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January 12, 2001

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To the Editors

The sins of 'Commonweal'

I believe "Relative Morality" (November 3, 2000) is the last and best word on the Catholic church and gay people of all that I've read in recent months in *Commonweal*. Until I read the article, I had never considered how the church's animus toward gays is on an altogether different plane from its stance toward divorced Catholics, single parents, contraceptive users, and women who've had abortions. Only we are defective, constitutionally evil people.

Father Willard Jabusch illustrates how people, including priests and bishops, are forced to reevaluate their beliefs when they learn that they have lesbian or gay friends and relatives. They begin to see past the stereotypes to the love and devotion in same-sex couples, the integrity and courage marking the lives of "out-of-the-closet" people.

So I say that "Relative Morality" has covered a multitude of sins. I don't know how members of *Commonweal*'s editorial board do not hear the voice of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson when they use the term "Homosexual Agenda" (October 6). You don't have to be gay to recognize the barb, the sting. It harks back to a term like the "Communist agenda."

I disagree with some of the other points made in the editorial and the "Department of Amplification" (December 1), though I take your side on the use of the word "bigotry." There are many Catholics who are not evil haters, bigots. They are just people who have not reconsidered what they are taught by churchmen.

That's why it's so satisfying to read in *Commonweal* an essay by a Catholic priest looking at the issue from the human, not the academic, point of view.

JOHN T. MORAN
Jackson Heights, N.Y.

Specimen or person?

The September 22, 2000 issue of *Commonweal* printed a letter from Mafalda Faillace on the subject of pregnancy and abortion. She made the point that in Catholic (and other) hospitals, if a woman miscarries and the fetus is less than twenty weeks or 500 grams, it is considered a pathological specimen, and it is not baptized. She also noted that a family insurance policy from the Knights of Columbus would not cover the fetus in such a circumstance.

Assuming the writer's statements are accurate, I expected that the letter would stimulate some controversy or discussion, given the Catholic church's position that human life begins at the moment of conception. So far, however, it has not. This puzzles me. If it is considered human at conception, why isn't it treated as human nineteen weeks later if it miscarries? Also, if a 450-gram fetus that miscarries at nineteen weeks is a pathological specimen, what should we call a less-than-twenty-week aborted fetus of the same weight?

I would welcome hearing from those wiser than I am in this field, their views on what appears to me to be a dilemma.

WILLIAM D. BRODERICK
Arlington, Va.

Higgins to Neuhaus

Largely ignoring the substance of my article, "Are Unions Obsolete?" (November 3, 2000), my friend Father Richard John Neuhaus in his rejoinder (December 1) said that it was "false and offensive" on my part to say that he had never publicly spoken this way about Cardinal John O'Connor's stand on labor issues while the cardinal was alive.

Neuhaus would have every right to be offended if that was what I had actually said. But it is emphatically not what I said. I knew perfectly well that Father Neuhaus had more than once said his piece in public about labor issues while the cardinal was alive. I also assumed, of course, that the cardinal, who had the reputation of being a serious reader, was fully aware of what Father Neuhaus had written about labor issues. But that's not what I was talking about in my article. Referring to his *National Catholic Register* interview in which he said that the cardinal's support of labor unions was "a weakness rather than a strength," I said that he "never spoke that way about the cardinal's stand on labor issues while the cardinal was alive."

There is nothing in Neuhaus's letter to dispute or even question the accuracy of this statement. I might add that I refrained from saying in my article that Neuhaus's silence in public about the cardinal's stand on labor issues until the cardinal had passed away was rather strange in view of the fact that, to his credit, Neuhaus has frequently and delightedly crossed swords in public with other living and high-ranking ecclesiastics. Rembert Weakland is a prime example in this regard. I have no way of knowing why Neuhaus made an exception in the case of Cardinal O'Connor.

At the end of his letter Neuhaus expresses the hope that I will emulate Cardinal O'Connor's admirable policy of accommodating respectful disagreement. Not to worry. As one who has been around the polemic track for more than fifty years, I don't take disagreements personally even when I feel that I have been misquoted, inadvertently or otherwise. In short, even though I honestly think that Neuhaus misconstrued my article, I still consider him a friend, and, needless to add, I hope that this feeling is mutual.

(MSGR.) GEORGE G. HIGGINS
Washington, D.C.

Ahead of the 'Times'

I was reminded recently of my appreciation of *Commonweal*'s coverage of religion in the public square as I read Alan Wolfe's balanced critique of *God's Name in Vain* by Stephen Carter (November 3, 2000). The acceptance of a call for a religious voice in public discourse and

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COMMONWEAL

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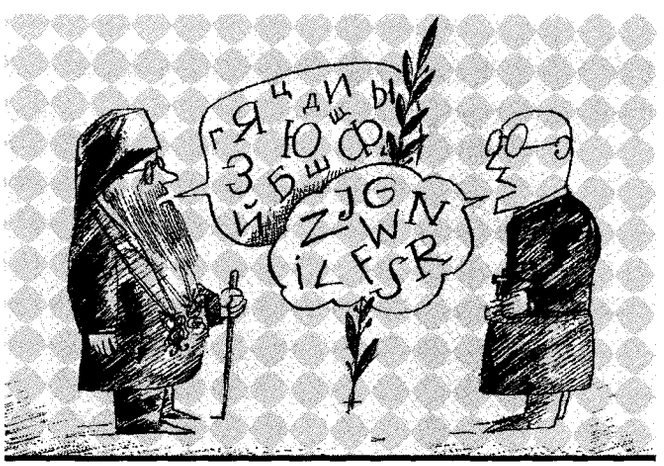

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a faith-based fortification of religious liberty and civic morality was a pleasant change from the strident rejection we so often hear—usually encoded in the so-called doctrine of separation of church and state—in the liberal media. Wolfe, while appreciating Carter's prognosis about the lack of space for the religious voice in much of contemporary American society, suggests that Carter exaggerates the extent of ordinary American hostility to making room for faith in the public arena. Wolfe, however, does not let his skepticism on this point cloud his responsibility to provide an honest review of Carter's thesis. The honesty was a vivid contrast to the hostile review of Carter's book by Brent Staples in the *New York Times Book Review* (November 26, 2000).

As a professor at an elite, secular, midwestern liberal college for twenty years, I have witnessed the subtle and not-so-subtle hostility toward religious expression. The arguments: it is putatively not relevant in "intellectual" arenas, reflects emotional rather than reasoned argument, and lacks moral (!) merit because it is presumably unthinkingly exclusive, historically and culturally oppressive, and remains closed to contemporary ideas about values, lifestyles, and priorities. I have seen students ridiculed for defending positions based on faith/belief arguments and orientations. College campuses are famous for their tolerance, but it is often a selective tolerance—a tolerance that often fences out conservative Christian expression. Hinduism or atheism is OK but Christianity, because of its so-called exclusive foundation, is not safe from the fence-it-out mentality of the liberal academic establishment that views "exclusive religion" as unacceptable in discussion of the life of the mind.

The irony of the double standard on tolerance and the liberal interpretation of what is acceptable is also seen in Staples's throwaway line near the end of his review. He writes, "The problem is that fundamentalism is incompatible with the capacious ecumenicalism that rules the public square." Indeed the combative assertion that conservative religion is unacceptable is the problem, and it is the very point that Carter makes in his follow-up book to *The Culture of Disbelief.*

Readers of *Commonweal* are considerably better served by its standards of balance than the readers of the *New York Times Book Review* are served by its more polemical standards.

LOUISA SUE HULET
Galesburg, Ill.

Guy talk

Regarding your commentary "The Homosexual Agenda" (October 6): So it isn't "clear" that women or homosexuals have suffered as severely as a "class" as have African Americans. Only an arrogant straight white male could have written such a line.

I suggest that you get off your smug Catholic butt and start doing some research. For starters, try reading Byrne Fone's *Homophobia.* Women have been suffering under the yoke of sexism since the beginning of time (much longer than African Americans). Homophobia is the byproduct of sexism. Have you ever read the Old Testament?

Shame on *Commonweal* for publishing such a reactionary piece.

CARLOS D. CHAVEZ JR.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Gay Catholics

Over the last several months I have followed the editorials and letters on the homosexual agenda (October 6, 2000 and issues following). While I am in agreement with *Commonweal*'s position that there is a homosexual agenda and that such an agenda should be open to dialogue in the political arena, I am surprised that few seem to have included any serious, sustained observation on the implications for gays in the Catholic church's own agenda. While there are differences among individual bishops (nationally) and conferences (internationally) on various rights, the official position of the church remains opposed to the majority of societal changes that are integral elements of the homosexual agenda. What puzzles me is the goal of the church with regard to an orientation that it describes as objectively disordered.

While the causes of this orientation are unknown at present (most probably, a combination of biological, psychological, social, and other factors),

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Mashed potatoes

The Bush II administration is looking a lot like Bush I, though it also bears some resemblance to the Nixon-Ford and Reagan years. In choosing cabinet members and close advisers, President-elect George W. Bush is reaching into the Republican past for a range and depth of government experience wanting on his own résumé. If there is a political equivalent of comfort food—familiar and consoling—Bush II looks to be it. Oh maybe, the Asiago cheese from Wisconsin (Governor Tommy Thompson), and the smoked elk from Colorado (Gale Norton) are a culinary reach for the down-home cook. Yet, those familiar faces, some from decades ago, belong on the comfort-food menu, especially for all of those who still hanker for Reagan's third term.

Presidential delegation to more expert and experienced cabinet members was the practice of both Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan, neither of whom was a policy wonk. On the other hand, both men were deeply trusted and regarded with affection by a large number of Americans. Bush does not come to office with that cushion: he lacks charisma and shows few signs of political acuity. Nor will he be sheltered even temporarily by the regard of the electorate. Half of registered voters didn't go to the polls at all, and the more-than-half who did voted for his opponent. In unprecedented circumstances, the presidency is Bush's to win, or not, post-election.

Perhaps it is the president-elect more than anyone else who needs a good meal of comfort food as he takes office. A close election in which he lost the popular vote and was awarded Florida's contested electoral vote by the U.S. Supreme Court's five most conservative justices leaves him on shaky ground, if not constitutionally than certainly politically and psychologically. He must quickly show that he is able to govern the country and his divided party, and that he is able to work with congressional Democrats who will be ready to criticize and resist many of his measures, and certainly some of his appointments.

The men and women Bush has gathered for his administration seem to promise a conservative agenda pragmatically carried out, yet there are some pointed questions to be asked about their plans. While the "national-interest-only" views of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice deserve serious scrutiny, it is those who will oversee the economy, the environment, and the military that initially raise the most serious questions. Bush has been playing up the current economic slow-down, perhaps as a prelude to a large tax cut. But with the deficit now under control is this a financially prudent move? Is the cut intended as a sound economic measure or as part of the continuing Republican effort to downsize government? Do Paul O'Neill, named secretary of the treasury, and Lawrence Lindsey, designated to head the Council of Economic Advisers, have the knowledge or skills for making a soft landing if the downturn grows? Both men will be hard pressed to match the monetary expertise and finesse of Clinton treasury secretaries, Robert Rubin and Lawrence Summers.

Gale Norton (interior) and Governor Christie Whitman (environmental protection) will be in charge of air and water as well as set the rules for federal land use. Their ideas and records are not promising. (We shuddered at and dismissed the thought that the appointment of two women to these posts will leave lots of room for the oil guys to get their way—sounds too much like a sexist conspiracy.)

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Donald Rumsfeld, as secretary of defense, is said to know the Pentagon and the ins and outs of military planning and technology. He knows or should know that a national missile defense appears to be technologically infeasible, but will he still be the front man who presides over Star Wars II—one of the most bizarre pipe dreams of the Reagan administration?

More happily, we look forward to Governor Tommy Thompson's crossing swords with congressional Democrats over U.S. abortion policy. There is not much the secretary of health and human services can do about *Roe* v. *Wade* as such, but we expect Thompson to conduct an intelligent and challenging debate with those who believe that the abortion right has no limits. About John Ashcroft as attorney general, we are not so sanguine.

Bon appétit to those at the table.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

E.J. DIONNE Jr.

DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN

Foe of ideological certainties

Imagine Henry Kissinger writing the following sentence to anyone: "I stand corrected. Your crystal ball was better than mine." Or imagine a United States senator so concerned that public buildings be designed to be beautiful that when the plastic cover protecting the soon-to-be-opened Hart Senate Office Building was removed in 1981, he introduced the following resolution: "Whereas the plastic cover has now been removed revealing, as feared, a building whose banality is exceeded only by its expense; and Whereas even in a democracy there are things it is as well the people do not know about government: Now, therefore, be it resolved, That it is the sense of the Senate that the plastic cover be put back."

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, who introduced that resolution and received that note from Kissinger, served his last full day in the Senate on January 2, 2001. After twenty-four years, the Senate will be Moynihanless, and a lesser Senate for that.

There is a cult of Moynihan in Washington, and I confess to being part of it. Members of the cult cross ideological lines, but it includes a disproportionate number of academics and political writers. And, of course, Moynihan pays kind attention to members of his guild. Because this is a cult, it's important to acknowledge that its object is not a perfect man—as Moynihan, a believer in Original Sin, would be the first to acknowledge. One of the great failures of reform in the last decade was the inability of Moynihan and President Bill Clinton to work together to pass comprehensive health-insurance legislation in 1994.

There's plenty of blame to go around on this issue, but Moynihan and Clinton could have built a public monument whose importance would have more than offset the banality of that Senate office building Moynihan couldn't stand. Because Moynihan is a large personality with an intricate mind, different people rally to him for very different reasons. My affection is rooted in respect for his skill at putting conservative ideas to progressive uses.

The first big controversy of Moynihan's life was his famous 1965 report, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." Moynihan was alarmed by the growth in single-parent (meaning fatherless) families in the African-American community. He spoke of a "tangle of pathology" confronting the poorest black children. Moynihan was denounced for "blaming the victim." In fact, as the sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset argues in a collection of tributes to Moynihan published by the Johns Hopkins University Press (and admirably summarized in the current issue of *The Public Interest*), Moynihan "was not blaming the victim; he was blaming the society, the white society" along with "external social factors and economic conditions." As most of his former critics now acknowledge, Moynihan was years ahead in seeing that if you care about social justice, you have to care about strong families.

The second of Moynihan's great conservative insights is that grand plans often run afoul of messy reality. He fears ideological certainty. This led him to a critique of sixties' liberalism, but also of conservatism in the eighties and nineties. "It is quite possible to live with uncertainty, with the possibility, even the likelihood, that one is wrong," Moynihan wrote in 1993. "But beware of certainty where none exists. Ideological certainty easily degenerates into insistence upon ignorance."

This view led to Moynihan's great, unsuccessful crusade against the welfare-reform bill in 1996. Where conservatives argued that nothing could have been worse than the old welfare system, Moynihan insisted, in good conservative fashion, that things could indeed be made worse. So far, low unemployment has undercut the most dire predictions about that welfare bill. But Moynihan's warnings will be a useful guide to reforming the welfare reform when it comes up for renewal in 2002.

Lastly, Moynihan always resisted the Marxist idea that economic class is the only thing that matters in politics. Oh yes, class is important, but so is ethnicity, the ties of clan and tribe. It is in part because of his sensitivity to ethnicity that Moynihan saw earlier than most that, as he put it in 1979: "The Soviet Empire is coming under tremendous strain. It could blow up." That, by the way, is why Kissinger graciously conceded the superiority of Moynihan's crystal ball.

Fortunately, Moynihan is not disappearing. He'll go on teaching (at Syracuse University) and writing, and, one hopes, making the occasional prediction. The man is more important than the office. You don't have to be a United States senator to be Daniel Patrick Moynihan. □

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PAUL BAUMANN

WAUGH ON THE MEDIA

Get it first, then get it right

I started watching the returns early election night. Consequently, I heard Dan Rather, CBS's king of cornpone, begin the evening with his now infamous promise. Speaking in his usual oleaginous fashion, Rather told us that CBS might not be the first network to call a particular state or race, but that being first wasn't the most important thing. "If we say somebody's carried the state, you can take that to the bank. Book it!" he proclaimed.

The rest, as they say, is history—or is it comedy? Shortly before 8 P.M., the networks, including CBS, stampeded to call Florida for Gore. By 10 they had all retracted that prediction, judging the race too close to call. After the evening's initial blunder, you would think that all caution would be exercised before a final Florida winner was announced. But if you thought that, you don't know the news biz. Shortly after 2 A.M., Fox News Channel, Rupert Murdoch's answer to "liberal media bias," declared Florida for George W. Bush and Bush as the next president. Lemming-like, the other networks quickly followed. "Unless there is a terrible calamity," ABC's Peter Jennings said, "George W. Bush, by our projections, is going to be the next president."

Calamity did not tarry. Al Gore, who like most Americans believes what he sees on the TV news, called Bush and conceded. As we all know, Gore was on his way to deliver his concession speech when Democratic operatives monitoring the returns alerted him to the inconclusive vote tally. By 4 A.M. the networks shamefacedly admitted they had gotten Florida wrong again.

The hallucinatory quality of this media debacle gets even better. It is now known that the Fox News consultant who called Florida for Bush was a man named John Ellis. Ellis is George W. Bush's cousin. "I am loyal to my cousin," Ellis is widely quoted as saying. "I put that loyalty ahead of my loyalty to anyone else."

Explanations from the networks of what went wrong sound like something straight out of "Saturday Night Live." "The call of Florida for Gore was not a mistake; it was a miscalculation," Fox News vice president John Moody told *Time*. "The call for Bush was not a miscalculation, it was a mistake. We did it without being sure."

Competition among the networks is ferocious, and the way in which competition distorts the news has never been more apparent. Despite Rather's assurances, the clear goal of all the networks is to be the first to announce the winner of the presidential race. Yes, the system of exit polling used for predicting winners has worked well in the past. But the enormous pressure to call a tight presidential election revealed just how fallible the media have always been.

That mistake-prone dynamic pervaded the ongoing coverage of the contested Florida vote as well. Despite all the hand wringing about election-night errors, the pattern of reckless reporting continued. When the U.S. Supreme Court instructed the Florida Supreme Court to clarify its ruling allowing recounts, initial TV and Internet reports of what the high court had done were wildly contradictory and inaccurate. The indefatigable Dan Rather broke into regular programming to announce, "The United States Supreme Court has struck down the Florida Supreme Court ruling in favor of Vice President Gore. It's a Bush win." Wrong. NBC and the Associated Press also got it wrong.

Clearly, the round-the-clock TV news format thrives on perpetuating crisis and a stark winner/loser storyline, either real or imagined. Consequently, we were subjected to violent swings in the tenor of the coverage, with each step in the legal process seeming to spell doom for one candidate or the other. The rush to get on the air with only half-digested news and to keep the public in a kind of frenzy over each candidate's prospects now seems a wholly illusory exercise.

Given the time pressures of TV and daily journalism, mistakes are inevitable. Still, how the big-time media performed in the last two months is more than sobering. In *Scoop*, Evelyn Waugh drew a bitingly satirical picture of the venality, confusion, and often sheer chaos that characterize the news business. Waugh was deeply suspicious of the powerful

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media of his day and what he thought was their frail grasp of reality and their eagerness to manipulate public opinion. Published in 1938, *Scoop* describes the adventures of William Boot, a hilariously inept foreign correspondent for London's *Daily Beast*. Boot, a nature writer, is mistakenly sent to cover a civil war in the obscure African country of Ishmaelia (somewhere near Chad, we imagine). The mass media, Waugh shows, are much more interested in keeping an eye on each other than on the story they're suppose to be covering. A whole host of John Ellis-like characters keep popping up in the most unlikely places, while a frenzy of mindless competition among the journalists generates one absurdly false story after another.

"'But it's going to be a tough assignment from what I hear,'" Corker, a news-agency correspondent, tells Waugh's inexperienced hero. "'Cut-throat competition. That's where I envy you—working for a paper. You only have to worry about getting your story in on time for the first edition. We have to race each other all day.'

"'But the papers can't use your reports any earlier than ours.'

"'No, but they use the one that comes in first.'

"'But if it's exactly the same as the one that came in second and third and fourth and they are all in time for the same edition...?'

"Corker looked at him sadly. 'You know, you've got a lot to learn about journalism.'"

Sometimes the news from Florida sounded uncannily like news from Ishmaelia. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

TOWARD A BRAINY CHURCH

Not top-down but back-and-forth

Conservatives in the church buttress their theological arguments for a centralized authority at the top of a hierarchy by relying on current assumptions about rational organization. As you go higher in organized institutional ranks, more power is accorded to impose decisions that overrule lower ones. Information and conflicting opinions may travel up a hierarchy to the top, but decisions and orders come down through the appropriate channels of command. Armies, navies, courts, and corporations run tight, efficient ships, so why shouldn't the church be organized in the same way? (The going model used to include feudalism and the divine right of kings, but today the international corporation is crowned.) One body must have one head, a family requires a husband-father, a unified institution must be commanded by one authority at the top, if we are to avoid chaos, incoherence, or heresy.

"Notice?—it's never the tubas or the violas or the timpani, it's always sh-sh-sh to us!"

Yet another model of rational decision making is emerging that challenges the assumption that dominance hierarchies are necessary for unity. While it may be true that even in the domains of language syntax, mathematical algorithms, and computer programs, rational hierarchies and decision rules operate, this does not seem to be the way the human brain is organized. The brain in its ability to achieve unified consciousness is undoubtedly the apex of human rationality. And, according to Nobel laureate Gerald M. Edelman, the brain is not a computer with a hierarchical computer program culminating in an executive processor. There is "no unique, computer-like central processor" with the ability to coordinate different areas (see Gerald M. Edelman and Giulio Tononi, *A Universe of Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination*, Basic Books). No little man or (papal?) homunculus sits at the top of a hierarchy receiving all the incoming messages and executing unilateral decisions downward. Edelman maintains that a dynamic core of the brain produces our unique unitary human consciousness through the operation of a dynamic and massively parallel process of circuitry. An incredibly complex, amazingly fast back-and-forth communication process enters and reenters between the parts of the system to achieve unity.

Edelman offers the explanatory analogy of a string quartet "in which each player responds by improvisation to ideas and cues of his or her own, as well as to all kinds of sensory cues in the environment." But since each player is connected by myriad fine threads or pathways of communication to all the

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other players, their actions and movements are conveyed back and forth from one to the other with lightning rapidity. These interacting signals influence and mutually regulate the players' actions. This constant circular mutual communication leads to a correlation of the players' notes so that coherent and integrated music emerges. No conductor, no boss, no hierarchical algorithms of instruction exist, but the mutual intercommunication of independent parts produces integrated harmony and unity, richer than each unit acting alone could ever produce.

Does this image of unity arising from equality and rich diversity sound familiar? Saint Paul used the human body as an analogy for the unity of the church. He describes the way the body's organs, such as hands and feet, act together; but for Paul there were still lower and higher organs. If we were to use an analogy drawn from the brain we could claim that it is possible for truly independent and equal entities to operate in their own unique ways, but through mutual communication to achieve a coherent unity without dominance. Individual unique Christian units, be they persons or churches, keep their independence, but through dynamic intercommunion and mutual influence, spontaneously interact to achieve unity. Coherence in the kingdom need not be dependent upon ascending hierarchies, exercising ever more executive control and exacting ever more subordination. A more vital way to achieve unity would consist of constant communication and mutual receptivity of all to all in the system. (As they say in information-processing talk, a system finally relaxes into equilibrium.) A theology of the church, and visions of Christian unity based upon the Trinitarian nature of Father, Son, and the all-pervasive power of the Holy Spirit, could be buttressed by pointing to the way rational human consciousness emerges and functions.

The brain, of course, depends upon nearly instantaneous dynamic back-and-forth communication of information. What would it take for the churches to match such speedy communication between independent units? In the past it took months, if not years, for a papal legate to travel over the Alps to deliver authoritative Roman decisions. Now, I understand, the newest oath of fidelity demanded by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith can come by fax. The jet plane also makes it possible to summon dissident bishops and theologians to Rome for reprimands. Such unilateral exercises of central authority are neither fast enough nor mutually open enough to follow the brain's pattern of dynamic back-and-forth communication. To get the quartet to make beautiful music in harmony, signals have to flow freely within the system. For church unity to equal humankind's unifying consciousness, we need signals that communicate without impediments and obstacles. Jesus told his disciples that authority in his kingdom would not be exercised in the domineering way that power was exercised in the world. Just because armies, empires, chimpanzee troops, and computers operate through top-down hierarchies of control, the church need not. Old wineskins are hard pressed to hold new wine. □

Medium

When she'd outgrown a Medium, my daughter
gave me a red ski sweater, strewn with snow
in knitted flakes. It's thick—wool—but the sweater's
extra warmth (despite the chilly rows
of crystals on the yoke of knitted firs)
had nothing to do with heft or wool or scarlet
and everything to do with being hers:
Spirits, bidden by her outgrown clothes,
materialize in what no longer fits her—
revenants of the girl that she outgrows.

And this red cardigan was even more.
Some essence seemed to pass from young to old,
as if it was the girl herself I wore
(or she was wearing me); as if her whole
self, in a reverse metempsychosis
—not a sweater, not a message; her—
was mine; as if what most completely clothes us,
keeping our meager bodies from the cold,
is what belonged to someone else before—
what's cast off, like a transmigrating soul.

Deborah Warren

Correction

On page 15 of the November 17, 2000 issue of *Commonweal*, there was a misprint in the ad for the **GodTalk Foundation**. The correct Web site address is: **www.godtalktv.org**. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

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Richard D. Friedman

'BUSH' v. 'GORE'

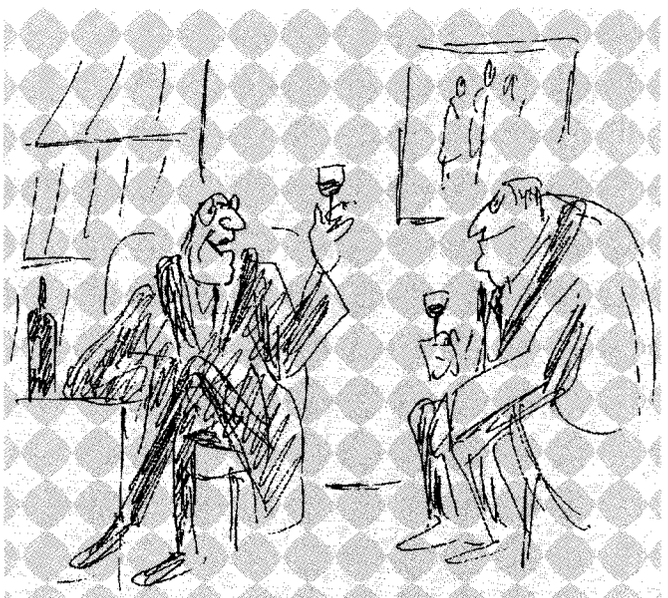
What was the Supreme Court thinking?

One of the most astonishing episodes in American political history ended last month with perhaps the most imperial decision ever by the United States Supreme Court. In one stroke, the Court exercised power that belonged to Congress, the legislature of Florida, Florida's courts and administrators, and, most importantly, the people of the state.

The Florida fiasco will probably result in a more equitable manner of voting throughout Florida and the nation. But if indeed it marks the virtual end of punch-card balloting, that will be because of initiatives by county officials, state legislatures, or Congress, not because the U.S. Supreme Court orders it as a matter of federal constitutional law.

In its December 12 decision, *Bush* v. *Gore*, the Court ruled that the recount of November's presidential election as ordered by the Florida Supreme Court violated constitutional requirements. The decision emphasized the variance, not only from one county to another but also from one recount team to another, of the standard used to determine the "intent of the voter." Most significantly, an incomplete perforation of a ballot was more likely to be counted as a vote in some times and places than in others.

The recount certainly wouldn't have been perfect. But perfection is often unattainable, and lack of perfection, as judges who pronounce the importance of judicial restraint frequently remind us, does not make a constitutional violation. The Florida Supreme Court had attempted to resolve a very difficult situation and in a very short amount of time. Punch ballots, as we all know now, are much less accurate than other forms of ballot. It was at least plausible to conclude that even a hastily arranged and loosely supervised statewide recount would come closer to ascertaining the intent of voters overall than simply ignoring all those ballots that the machines had spit out uncounted. Consequently, the recount ordered by the Florida court may be seen as an attempt to limit this larger disparity.



"Ah, to make a mockery of justice. Just once!"

Yes, the "intent of the voter" standard established by the Florida legislature is open-ended and leaves room for variation, but so are many other standards—begin with the "reasonable doubt" standard for juries—that courts have declined, for good reason, to define more precisely. Reality is complex. No simply articulated rule will apply perfectly, and the more intricate the rules, the harder not only to articulate but to administer consistently. Perform any recurrent task involving any complexity and you will recognize that, even if you are the sole actor, your standards will vary.

And that fact points to a huge irony. For all the U.S. Supreme Court majority's insistence on standards, it is hard to know what the Court's standard was in this case. It is not unusual for a court to caution that in a particular decision it is not articulating a broad rule of law but is only deciding the case before it, leaving other cases to the future. That is what the majority did here. Sometimes such opinions represent tentative openings onto new vistas of law. And indeed some observers have suggested that the decision in *Bush* v. *Gore* heralds a new era of constitutional doctrine assuring the fairness of voting. But for two reasons a large dollop of cynicism is warranted on this score.

First there is the identity of the five justices (Rehnquist, O'Connor, Scalia, Kennedy, and Thomas) who anchored the majority. (Justices Ginsburg and Breyer agreed rather ambiguously that the recount raised constitutional difficulties, but they disagreed on the ultimate result.) These so-called "strict constructionists" are not the ones we would expect to perceive the necessity of federal judicial intervention into an administrative procedure supervised by the state courts.

The second reason is that the majority opinion is Procrustean; it articulates rationales just broad enough to cover this case. No, says the Court, we're not saying that counties can't use different voting systems; what we are saying is that when a court orders a statewide remedy, then we're really going to worry about uniformity. That's a conclusion, not a standard. If the legislature can delegate broad authority to local officials, why can't a court leave it to local officials to implement on a case-by-case basis a legislatively prescribed standard for determining the validity of a vote?

In short, trying to determine fairly who won the election in Florida was for the state itself to work out in the first instance; ultimately it was for Congress to judge in exercising its constitutional function of counting the electoral votes. The U.S. Supreme Court should have stayed out of the matter altogether.

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Though the holding that the recounts violated the Constitution was overly aggressive, it was not particularly egregious. What was egregious was the Court's decision on remedy. Given the majority's determination that the recounts did not satisfy constitutional requirements, one would have expected a remand so that the Florida court could order recounts that did meet those requirements. Instead, the five justices played what amounts to a sleight-of-hand trick.

A federal statute of 1887, anticipating another episode like the disputed election of 1876, provides a "safe harbor" to a state: If a state sets up a procedure before the election for resolving a dispute over who won, and that procedure results in a final determination by a certain date (December 12 in this instance), then the determination is binding on Congress when it counts the electoral votes. The Florida Supreme Court had indicated that the state's desire to take advantage of the safe harbor "circumscribed" the determination of what a "reasonable" deadline for recounts was under Florida law. The nation's highest court seized on this vaguely stated expression of desire and used it to shut the process down. It was clear Florida couldn't have a constitutional recount by December 12. And, said the five justices, Florida didn't want recounts after December 12; therefore, it couldn't have recounts at all. That's a leap too far. The Florida court had never indicated that state law demanded finality by the safe harbor date (which the state statutes do not even mention), even if the only constitutional way to complete manual recounts (which the state statutes certainly do provide for) would be to miss that date. But the Supremes, in contrast to what they had done the first time the election fight had reached them, did not give the Florida court a chance to clarify its meaning. Instead, they effectively declared: Game over.

Why did they do it? The easy answer, that they simply wanted to see a Republican in the White House and were willing to do whatever it took to get that result, seems too crude...

Why did they do it? The easy answer, that they simply wanted to see a Republican in the White House and were willing to do whatever it took to get that result, seems too crude, though a rooting interest for that outcome surely affected their thinking. They may have lost faith in the Florida Supreme Court, which had been somewhat overly aggressive in response to the blatant partisanship of Secretary of State Katherine Harris. And they may have thought their intervention was necessary to yield an orderly resolution.

If so, the justices misread the situation and the Court's own role. Play out what would have happened if the Supreme Court allowed a statewide recount to continue, subject to whatever safeguard it deemed necessary, and had then withdrawn from the scene. First, the easy case: Bush may have won the recount. How much more satisfying as a result that would have been than the one we have now!

Now the harder case—Gore wins the recount. Even if the recount were incomplete by the date the Electoral College met (December 18), the Gore electors could have voted then and been certified later (in this case by the courts), as occurred with their Hawaii counterparts in 1960–61. So there would have been two or perhaps three competing slates presented to Congress; remember that the legislature was getting into the act, with its legally unsupportable contention that it was entitled to appoint electors if the election were not resolved quickly enough.

And then what? Federal law provides that, if multiple slates are presented and none qualifies for the safe harbor, a slate accepted by both Houses of Congress prevails. But if the two Houses do not agree, then the slate certified by the executive of the state should be accepted.

This whole process would have been messy. It almost certainly would have been highly partisan. In the end, though, our president would have been chosen as always by politics. Members of Congress perceived to have acted unfairly would have had to answer at the polls.

In a way, then, the most discouraging aspect of the whole affair is not that the Court acted improperly but that we, and it, seem to have lost confidence that any other institution but the Court is capable of acting properly. Under the Constitution, the electoral votes are opened in Congress, not before the Supreme Court. And in 1876–77 there was no thought that the power to resolve controversies concerning the choice of electors resided anywhere else. But now we have come to expect the Court to decide great issues of our national life. *Dred Scott* and *Roe* v. *Wade* should have persuaded the Court that its decisions cannot quell political controversy. *Bush* v. *Gore* is more stunning than those cases in one sense, because it steps on the central function of democracy. But it is a one-time intrusion, not an attempt to resolve a continuing issue like slavery in the territories or abortion. It will not guide future doctrine, and the circumstances that allowed the Supreme Court in effect to pick our president are unlikely to be repeated. So we just have to move on, with the hope that expressions of disgust will shape the way history views this debacle. □

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CAN JEWS TRUST CATHOLICS?

A rabbi looks forward

Michael A. Signer

The celebration of Jubilee 2000 reached beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community, leading to dramatic steps toward reconciliation with other religious communities. In particular, Pope John Paul II focused his efforts on putting an end to the enmity that has existed between Jews and Christians over much of the past two thousand years. In his reflections on the jubilee, he often referred to the penitential actions of Christians toward Judaism by the Hebrew word *Teshuvah*, a term rooted in the idea of "return"—a return to God and God's way. For Jews it is at the very center of our religious lives. It is a path that leads from acknowledgment of sin to the resolution not to commit the sin again. Therefore, when the pope asks Catholics to engage in the process of Teshuvah toward Jews, it engenders some questions: How shall the Jewish community respond to the papal call to Teshuvah? How can Jews know that Christian Teshuvah is genuine?

The great Jewish philosopher and theologian Moses Maimonides provides some guidance. In "Laws of Repentance" he writes, "It is prohibited for a person to be cruel *(akhzari)* and not to be reconciled. Rather, let a person be inclined to be forgiving and hard to anger. When the sinner asks him for forgiveness let him be forgiving with a whole heart and a generous soul....This is the way of the seed of Israel for their heart is predisposed in this fashion." Maimonides then notes a remarkable contrast between the predisposition of the heart of the Jew and the idolater—those of uncircumcised heart—explaining that the latter "keep their anger forever." The Jewish community might be guided by Maimonides's statement when they read the recent call by the Vatican's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews for Christians to make Teshuvah for two millennia of sins against the Jewish people. They need to think about how they want to respond to that call. Will they answer from the standpoint of what Maimonides calls the "Jewish heart" (*lev nachon*)—a heart predisposed to generosity and forgiveness—or will they respond as idolaters?

The call for Christian, and specifically Catholic, Teshuvah is a measure of the success of the Jewish-Christian conversations on the international, national, and local levels. Since the end of World War II, and with the growing consciousness of the enormity of the crimes of the Shoah, Jews and Christians have met face to face and have truly heard each other. From the meeting between Jules Isaac, author of the groundbreaking *Jesus and Israel,* and John XXIII to the countless gatherings with John Paul II, a new Christian theological attitude toward Judaism has been forged. This dialogue has even taken on the character of a choreography: first comes dialogue, then a statement from the Vatican Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews, and then the cacophony of voices from the Jewish community, with some responding "Not enough!" and others responding "We have gone further on the journey. We shall continue." Both responses have contributed to furthering the dialogue for more than forty years. Since 1994, however, the Catholic side, under the pope's leadership, has moved the consequences of the dialogue deeply inside the church.

In 1994, John Paul II issued *Tertio millennio adveniente*, in

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which he set an agenda for the entire church to greet the year 2000. Part of this pastoral plan was a series of dialogues with non-Christian communities that had been the objects of harsh treatment by the church. This call was reflective of the inner thinking of the church. The fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz came in 1995, and every council of bishops in Europe, including those in Poland and Hungary, issued a statement that focused specifically on the crimes that the church and its members had perpetrated against the Jewish people during the Shoah. To read these statements, which can be found in *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* (United States Catholic Conference, 1998), edited by Eugene Fisher, is to experience in these various statements from the national bishops' conferences a sense of profound regret and loss—the loss of an opportunity during the Shoah to act in response to the highest ideals of Christianity. In these statements Jews can discern the language of "co-responsibility" or "sin" that so many Jews found lacking in the Vatican statement "We Remember" that emerged in 1998 from the Vatican Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews. No matter what the initial reaction to the statement, however, members of the Jewish community note the significant linguistic phenomenon of having two Hebrew words appear: "Shoah" in place of "Holocaust" and—more important for our purposes—"Teshuvah" instead of "repentance."

Some members of the Jewish community have condemned the Catholic church for not issuing an "apology" to the Jewish people. Rabbi David Novak has responded by saying that an apology would only cheapen the action required. An apology would be a once-and-done-with moment. By shifting the term to the Hebrew term Teshuvah, rather than simply using "penitence," the Catholic church is calling for a process of healing. It will be long and it will require many years. Regret and confession of the sins of mistreating the Jewish people are found in the articulation of misdeeds that require reflection and resolution so that the actions will not be repeated. Regret and confession of sins for Catholics means that they will pray to discover ways to end the hatred and the stereotypes that produce hatred. Regret and confession of sins may lead Catholics to be more sensitive to the Jewish people and to stand in solidarity with them.

We are entering an era in which the main outlines of Catholic-Jewish reconciliation have been set by the present papacy. Beyond the pope's confession, many local bishops have spoken directly to the Jewish people and to their own dioceses about the need for Teshuvah. The late Cardinal John O'Connor was among the first to proclaim this message. Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee issued a magnificent litany of regret. Many of my Jewish colleagues have experienced the fruits of their long-standing relationships with their local bishops or senior pastors in the local parishes. These statements and liturgical occasions signal what is to come.

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What are the signs or actions of Teshuvah demonstrated by this papacy? The pope visited the synagogue in Rome, indicating that it is a place where God dwells with the people of Israel. He has knelt in prayer at Auschwitz, and made that prayer a leitmotif of preaching throughout his papacy. He was particularly sensitive to Jewish outcry during the controversy over the Auschwitz Carmelite convent in 1988, and encountered considerable opposition from local Catholic communities there. He established diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. He initiated a theology of Teshuvah with respect to the Jewish communities that climaxed in a liturgical ceremony in Rome in April 2000. He made a pilgrimage to Israel—not just the Holy Land, but Israel—where his actions demonstrated respect for and deference to both civil and religious authorities. He prayed at Yad VaShem and put a petition into the Western Wall of the ancient Temple, expressing deep sorrow over the behavior of sons and daughters of the church. The pope sets this example. Will others follow?

What will be the consequences of Teshuvah for Christians with respect to the Jewish people? They have rejected and will continue to reject targeted proselytism of the Jewish people. Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has told my classes at the University of Notre Dame that the new attitude toward the Jewish people does not mean that the church has lost its evangelical message to the nations. But the relationship with the Jewish people is a relationship with the roots of the church. He asked them, "If the roots are false, then what are we?" Clearly, Teshuvah toward the Jewish people will call for continuing reformulation of Christian self-understanding. The Christian story will need rethinking. As professor Mary Boys writes in her new book, *Has God Only One Blessing?* (Paulist Press, 2000), perhaps the greatest consequence of Christian Teshuvah will be the resolution to work in collaboration with the Jewish community "to be a blessing to one another and to the world."

By shifting to the Hebrew term Teshuvah, rather than simply using "penitence," the Catholic church is calling for a process of healing. It will be long and it will require many years.

This lengthy litany of the consequences of Christian Teshuvah is unprecedented and unnerving for us as Jews. We know how to defend ourselves against proselytizing. We have the stories of our martyrs, both in the medieval world and during the Shoah. But we have not yet faced a Christian world that turns toward us with respect for our integrity as a people whose covenant has never been revoked. Teshuvah requires the *baal teshuvah*, the penitent, to be vulnerable. It also makes a claim upon the one who has been wronged. Can we, at a moment of our own sense of weakness against the forces of assimilation and secularism, afford to let down our guard? If Jews receive Christian Teshuvah with an open heart, do they betray their ancestors who died as martyrs rather than submit to forced conversions?

The Jewish community might consider some rather basic steps that would be very much in continuity with what it has done in the past. It can work in collaboration with Christians on local projects that promote mutual understanding. In these projects there is no need to worry about homogenizing Judaism. The Jewish tradition can be presented with integrity—emphasizing elements of difference and similarity. Both communities can continue to forge alliances for social justice between synagogues and local parishes. We will not agree on every social and economic issue, but the work for social justice can be more explicitly grounded in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible—a sacred text our traditions share.

It may also be the time to step forward more boldly and adopt a less defensive attitude toward those Christian groups, especially the Catholic church. Members of the Jewish community can learn about what has happened among Christians so they do not continue to recite the same litany of negativity. More than two hundred rabbis and Jewish scholars signed *Dabru Emet*, a Jewish theological statement about Christians and Christianity that appeared on September 10, 2000 in the *New York Times* and the *Baltimore Sun*. This assurance of our support for the process of Teshuvah may encourage further steps toward reconciliation.

We surely can have empathy for many Catholics who feel beleaguered about the continuity of their communities. So much has changed for them since Vatican II. Many of their children do not know the church of the 1950s, and those children have a sense of rootlessness that resonates with what our own children have experienced. We know this pain. Many young Catholics want more ritual and search for a deeper spiritual foundation for their faith. Their parents are concerned about intermarriage and what that will mean for the shape of their families and faith. We know this worry.

If we Jews respond to Christian Teshuvah with acknowledgment and encouragement, we need not think that we have betrayed our sacred martyrs, our history. We are in no position to forgive for specific acts. But those who are making Teshuvah did not commit those acts, and many of them are dedicated to ensuring that that history does not repeat itself. We will not preserve the Jewish people by preserving our anger about the sins of the past. □

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1054 & ALL THAT

Look to the undivided church

Jerry Ryan

One way to move beyond the current stalemate in our efforts toward Christian unity is to take the state of the undivided church, before 1054, as a point of reference. The Vatican II decree on ecumenism states as much and John Paul II, in his 1995 encylical, *Ut unum sint*, recalls that "for a whole millennium Christians were united in a brotherly, fraternal communion of faith and sacramental life. If disagreements in belief and discipline rose among them, the Roman See acted by common consent as mediator." And there is a broader consensus. The recent attempt at reunification between the Catholic Melkite and the Orthodox in the Antiochean church took their common heritage as the basis of a projected merger. Most of the Reformed churches would accept the teachings of the ecumenical councils of the first millennium. The ongoing Catholic dialogue with the "Oriental churches" (Armenian, Syrian, etc.), communities that did not accept the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon, is leading to the conclusion that it was misunderstanding, rather than doctrinal divergences, that caused the rupture. In short, using the church of the first millennium as a model is our best hope for ecumenical progress.

Imagine a future, truly ecumenical council where all the parties who profess the Nicean Creed—the Roman church, those who issued from the Protestant Reformation (Lutheran, Anglican, etc.), the Orthodox, and Oriental Christians—sit down as equals, without arrogance or sense of superiority, and analyze their respective histories since the rupture. Each would try to see the positive in what the Holy Spirit has accomplished in other churches and how the particular grace of each might enrich all. The goal of the council would be for the churches to pass from coexistence to what might be called "pro-existence": existing for the other and not just alongside one another. This would require a profound conversion and purification of memories.

If this were to be done, the churches might well discover that their particular charisms and insights are more complementary than antagonistic, that there is more paradox than "clarity" in the Christian mysteries, and even that differences are necessary if certain elements of the truth are to be manifested. In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul II said: "Why has the Holy Spirit permitted all these divisions?... Could it not be that the divisions have also been a path continually leading the church to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ's gospel?...It is necessary for humanity to achieve unity through plurality to learn to come together in one church even while presenting a plurality of ways of thinking and acting of civilizations and cultures."

If the starting point for our hypothetical council is to be the state of the undivided church before 1054, this would imply, for the Roman church, the recognition that all its councils since the rupture have not been truly ecumenical. In other words, they have been local councils of the Western church and not universally binding. Paul VI opened the door to such a possibility when, at the seven hundredth anniversary of the Council of Lyon, he referred to it as "the sixth of the general synods held in the West." This does not mean that the teachings of these Western councils or the papal "dogmatic" definitions would cease to oblige Roman Catholics, nor does it imply that other Christians should not take them very seriously. Often, teachings and dogmas develop from polemical situations and are affirmations of an aspect of the truth believed to be compromised or neglected. Christianity is a religion of paradoxes, where we are often asked to affirm, as absolutes, terms that are apparently contradictory. How to reconcile free will with the omniscience of God, the reality of history with the eternal instant, justice with mercy, the true divinity and true humanity of Jesus? We can only seize and articulate one of these terms at a time. Might this not be the profound theological reason for so many divisions? By taking one side of the paradox and affirming it absolutely we apparently negate the other side. That's when anathemas begin to fly and dialogue becomes impossible.

In reaching common ground it is necessary to evaluate the true significance of a particular teaching, taking into consideration the circumstances in which it developed. The definition of papal infallibility is a case in point. One of the complexities of the historical situation surrounding Vatican I was the ambition of European secular rulers to control national episcopacies. Given this papal concern, it is remarkable to read the explanation of the proposed dogma as it was presented to the council by Monsignor Vinzenz Gasser, the official "relator." According to Gasser's presentation, "the most appropriate situation for the exercise of infallibility would be when scandals concerning the faith, dissensions, and heresies come to pass in a given church and they are of such a magnitude that the bishops of that church (individually or in provincial council) cannot cope with them and, for this reason, feel obliged to submit them to the Holy See." Moreover, infallibility is linked to the mission of the pope to "conserve

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the church in the unity of faith and charity and restore this unity when it is disturbed."

What Gasser is describing here is, in fact, the practice of the undivided church of the first millennium. The pope is the ultimate judge in matters of controversy regarding the faith which cannot be resolved on a local level. The definition of infallibility does not separate the pope from the church, since he can only exercise this prerogative insofar as he is recognized as the efficacious sacrament of the unity of the church. The church is not infallible because of the pope; the pope is infallible because of the church. The famous "*ex sese, non ex consensu ecclesiae*" (the pope is infallible by reason of his office, not through the consent of the church) has its justification in the vagueness of the "consent of the church."

If it be accepted that Vatican I was a local council of the Western church, the declaration that "the bishop of Rome possesses a true episcopal power of jurisdiction, ordinary and immediate, over the totality of the pastors and faithful" would maintain its validity for the Western church. Outside of the jurisdiction of the Western patriarch, Rome would cede to local customs. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger himself has declared, "Rome should not apply the doctrine of Roman primacy of Vatican I to the East because this 'dogma' was formulated and practiced after the separation of 1054: it can only oblige the East to maintain what was practiced during the first millennium."

In *Ut unum sint*, John Paul II recognizes the need to revise the mechanisms of papal authority and asks for help to bring about this revision. A truly ecumenical council would help the Catholic church to distinguish the essential role of Rome as the "mother church" (after the fall of Jerusalem) *vis-à-vis* the rest of the Christian world. But the jurisdictional structure Rome has given itself in the second millennium need not be imposed on the other churches. The Reform bodies, for example, have elaborated their own structures, many of which are often more conformed to the primitive traditions of collegiality and charismas. Similarly, the ecclesial intuitions of the Eastern and Reformed churches could become a very profitable complement to the Roman vision.

But what about the Marian "dogmas"? The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are rooted in the patristic axiom that Mary was the *worthy* Mother of God, a worthy tabernacle of the Most High. But she was also the daughter of Abraham, the heiress of the faith of the patriarchs and prophets. The faith of the Virgin is the culmination of a whole history of humanity's response to the revealing acts of God and the experience of his redemptive love. The extraordinary graces given to Mary in view of her role in redemption do not put her outside of salvation history or make her any less our sister. In his magnificent epilogue to the *Sign of Jonas*, Thomas Merton has God speaking: "What is vile has become precious. What is now precious was never vile; for what is vile I know not at all." Baptism accomplishes in us what the Immaculate Conception accomplished in Mary. We become, as it were, immaculately conceived—and the power of his grace will eventually transform our earthly bodies. There is nothing here, as far as I can see, which does not correspond to the perennial faith of the undivided church.

What is objectionable is the fact that these "dogmas" were proclaimed unilaterally by the Roman church. What are also objectionable are certain forms of Marian piety that so exalt the Mother of God that they distance her from us and the vicissitudes of the human condition.

What of the churches separated from Rome? Orthodoxy, during the last millennium, has continued to probe the mysteries of faith. Gregory of Palmas expounded on the implications of our participation in the divine life; the theology of the "divine energies" took form; and ecclesiology evolved with the concept of *sobornost* ("conciliarity"). Amid persecution and humiliation a profound mystical theology was born, a pearl of great price for the universal church.

The Reformation, on the other hand, brought into focus the royal priesthood of the laity and their immense dignity. The notion of the sacraments as gifts was an important contribution which had hitherto been neglected. The Pentecostal movement, for its part, returned the Holy Spirit to its rightful place in the lives of the faithful. There are those churches which have highlighted the mission of evangelizing the poor, others which have focused on the exigencies of fraternal charity and the common life. An attitude of "pro-existence" would assume all that is positive in the evolution of Christianity in its diverse forms. It will require of all Christians a great humility and openness to the Holy Spirit to be able to put things in their proper perspective, to distinguish what is essential and authentic and what are the vicissitudes of a sinful history. The reformers reacted against the clerical abuse of power, and rightly so. But was this sufficient grounds for rejecting the sacramental structure of the church's hierarchy and the ancient tradition of apostolic succession? The apostolic power, as Saint Paul describes it, is rooted and exercised in human weakness, fragility, and humiliation, but it is a divine power nonetheless. The Reformed churches would need to reconsider their rejection of apostolic succession, as Catholicism and Orthodoxy would need to reconsider the essential nature and exercise of this "power."

It would be fitting that the church of Rome seek to convoke our hypothetical "pro-existence" council—but it need not be so. In fact, it might be preferable if the initiative came from Orthodoxy or the World Council of Churches. There will no doubt be elements in each church adamantly opposed to any "compromise." The general reception and even anger that greeted the document *Dominus Iesus* last year was highly significant. The reactions to its tone, timing, and content, both within the Roman church and without, was a striking example of the *sensus fidei* at work, refusing to recognize what is not of the Spirit. Still, it must be remembered that the truly ecumenical councils of the first millennium produced great and charismatic saints to guide the church. There is no reason to believe that the Holy Spirit is any less capable of raising up mighty saints today. □

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Richard Alleva

BEAM ME UP

A repackaged Apocalypse

If I were to ask you to name the five most popular novelists in America, I suppose you might rattle off three of them before hesitation set in. John Grisham? Right. Tom Clancy? Of course. J.K. Rowling? Good. And the other two?

How many of you would venture the names Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins? They are the authors of the *Left Behind* series, which, according to the *leftbehind.com* Web site, has sold millions upon millions and appeared on the best-seller lists of the *New York Times* and *USA Today*. I tend to believe all this self-promotion because of the gentle handling given the series last fall by NPR's "All Things Considered." For a radio program with a mindset this liberal to treat Christian apocalyptic pulp fiction as a publishing phenomenon without venturing a word of criticism, sarcasm, or even mild irony means that *Left Behind* is truly newsmaking stuff.

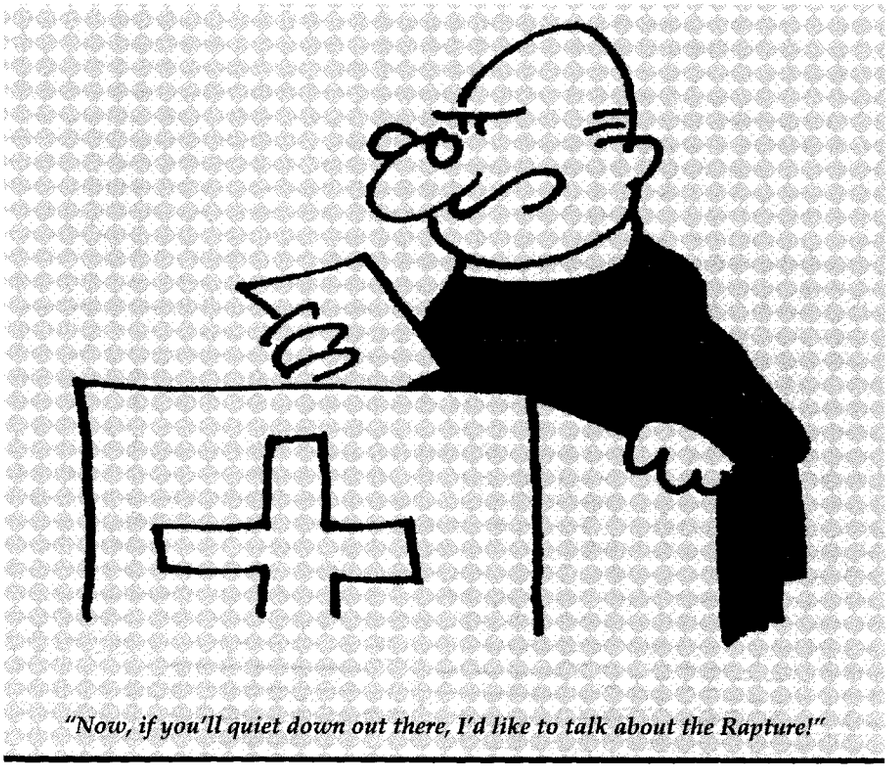
The saga, currently in its eighth installment, begins with the Rapture, the fulfillment of the prophecy, purportedly in the Book of Revelation, that right-minded Christian believers will be snatched off the earth and, still carnate, be united with God, while those without a personal relationship with Jesus will face the Apocalypse with all its attendant horrors. Since a lot of tolerably moral people don't have such a personal relationship, LaHaye and Jenkins are able to confect four sympathetic characters—an airline pilot and his daughter, a celebrity journalist, and a minister—frail enough spiritually to have been left behind but virtuous enough to fight the Antichrist in the few remaining years of the world's existence. *Left Behind* is Christian literature that functions as an international espionage thriller: *Pilgrim's Progress* in the guise of *The Marathon Man*.

I seek no quarrel with the idea of the Rapture or even with the authors' interpretation of it. In fact, I found LaHaye's lengthy, nonfictional exposition of this subject on the Web site to be a completely sincere and often interesting analysis. But when religious teaching comes packaged as entertainment, the packaging affects the teaching. So how does *Left Behind*, the most popular literary Christian entertainment in America today, come across as a thriller?

As an unresisting imbecility. It fails to provide any of the elements that a thriller must have to thrill.

A good thriller needs verisimilitude of background so that the lurid events in the foreground can compel belief. Therefore, the author must display a certain knowledge of the world, or at least the world in which the heroes move. (Think of the etiquette of gambling casinos on display in the James Bond series or the erudition about everything from campanology to advertising agencies in Dorothy Sayers's Peter Wimsey books.) Judging by their novels, LaHaye and Jenkins know nothing of anything except Scripture. For instance, their arch-villain, a Romanian politico, addresses the UN General Assembly and wows it, not with his simple-minded speech but by translating it, as he goes along, into nine languages. (So what ever happened to headphones and simultaneous translation?) Then, by way of tribute, he lists—in alphabetical order— the name of every represented country. "He...never once hesitated, stammered, or mispronounced a syllable. Buck [our reporter-hero] was on the edge of his seat as the speaker swept through the t's and reached 'Uganda! Ukraine!'"...etc. For this feat alone, the demonic Romanian is appointed secretary general. I suppose if he had memorized a few pages from the phone book, he would have been made president of the World Bank. This is only one of dozens of absurdities scattered through the books.

A good thriller needs at least superficially interesting, or at least distinguishable, characters to root for. But all



"Now, if you'll quiet down out there, I'd like to talk about the Rapture!"

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of *Left Behind*'s heroes, male or female, pilot or minister, scientist or news-bureau chief, sound exactly alike, never evincing a single idiosyncrasy that would make them appear truly human.

A good thriller has to be told in fluid, flexible prose. The simple declarative sentence monotony that LaHaye and Jenkins employ is mind-numbing and thrill-killing.

The plot of any thriller must constantly advance, sometimes in little increments, sometimes in sudden leaps. But the plot strategy of the saga's first two volumes (I must confess I couldn't drag myself beyond volume 2) is a teeter-tottering one: the villain does something headline-grabbing and the heroes get together and review its apocalyptic implications. Then the villain does something else and the heroes discuss. Evil deed. Discussion. Evil deed. Discussion. On and on, back and forth.

So, if this series is such a bust as writing, as storytelling, as sheer entertainment, why has it become a bestseller?

The authors have succeeded in using the theological ideas of the Rapture and the Apocalypse to press all the right paranoiac American buttons. The forces of evil, at least in the early books, proceed not by overtly supernatural means but by winning over, sometimes taking over, institutions that strike terror in the heart of all-American know-nothingness: the United Nations, the Catholic church, the Jews (a people, of course, not an institution, but nonetheless perceived as a malign, conspiratorial institution by some who will take *Left Behind* to heart).

LaHaye and Jenkins are certainly not overt anti-Semites. How could they be? According to the way they read Revelation, God's ultimate kingdom can only be achieved after the conversion of the Jews, so the authors have to have, ultimately, kindly intentions toward God's chosen people. But the authors' perception of the Jews as a great people gone wrong streaks the books with a queasy, forced amiability teetering on contempt, like a hotel manager forced to accept Jews after the state has overruled his gentiles-only policy. Consider that the Romanian Antichrist is first able to come to international attention when a great Israeli scientist-statesman, Chaim Rosenzweig (an echo of Chaim Weizmann?), becomes his admirer and conduit into international circles, even introducing him at the UN. This Rosenzweig is so brainy a scientist that he has invented a formula that causes deserts to bloom, and so savvy a political thinker that he has become an adviser to presidents. Yet he is completely taken in by the Antichrist, even though the latter has nothing material to offer Israel or anything to recommend himself except the aforementioned powers of memorization. But it is probably necessary, within the overall design of the series, to have the material and intellectual forces of Israel (represented by Rosenzweig) back up the Antichrist before the forces of enlightened goodness (represented by our Christian heroes) save the Jews from their own disbelief in Christ.

The Catholic church takes its lumps, too. The latest pope is raptured but that is because he had stirred up controversy in the church with a new doctrine that seemed to coincide more with the "heresy" of Martin Luther than with historic orthodoxy. A cardinal more representative of his church dares to tell our journalist-hero that he doesn't take the Apocalypse literally, and of course opposes the doctrine of salvation through faith alone. Since our heroes believe just the opposite and it is precisely these beliefs that enable them to fight the Antichrist, the reader knows just what to think of this red hat in the service of the Scarlet Woman of Rome.

But the most severe condemnation-by-implication is of the United Nations, which practically hands itself over to the Antichrist and becomes the arm of his will. And what is his will? A world government, a world capital called New Babylon, a world army, and a world religion—all the usual suspects placed at the service of Satan's minion. In a country like ours, where fear of centralization and government interference has led to bombings, mass slaughter, and the creation of various thug militia-groups, how could the *Left Behind* series fail?

Dismissing it as entertainment, can

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we take *Left Behind* seriously as a parable about the Rapture? Even as that, it can't compare with Michael Tolkin's seductively mysterious movie, *The Rapture* (1991). While LaHaye and Jenkins set their scene in an America that is as devoid of reality as a bad comic strip, Tolkin gave us a Los Angeles so convincingly in the grip of technology that it makes sense for the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to appear on TV before they ravage the earth. While the characters of *Left Behind* are all square-jawed, shoot-from-the-hip, overgrown Boy Scouts, Tolkin's heroine, desperate to be liberated from her sterile hedonism but too lacking in faith to wait for God to accomplish things at his own pace, is a marvelous embodiment of the pilgrim soul. *The Rapture* projects a mysteriousness that can at least momentarily convince the most hard-headed skeptic that great forces are at work behind the scenery of this world, while *Left Behind*, with its flat, affectless prose, strives to make a rich, ambiguous book, John's Revelation, into something as literal and useful as that car owner's manual you keep in the glove compartment.

Is good popular Christian fiction by now an impossibility? *The Rapture*, like the novels of Graham Greene, the poetry of T.S. Eliot, the films of Eric Rohmer and Robert Bresson, is highbrow, idiosyncratic, modernistic. Have we reached the point at which the Christian world-view can be rendered with dignity only by the most refined Christian artists for the most educated audiences? The musical tradition of dramatizing Christian themes and stories for a fairly wide audience extends into modern times with Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, Menotti's *Amahl*, Poulenc's *Christmas Motets*. But where are the recent novels, plays, movies, or shows with overtly Christian stories aimed at the masses? It's been half a century since C.S. Lewis's wonderful Narnia books instructed and entertained children without any of LaHaye's narrative-jamming preachments. Will the greatest popular Christian fiction of the twentieth century turn out to be a series written for children by an Oxbridge don? In any event, the accolade certainly doesn't belong to *Left Behind*. □

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Celia Wren

TAKE FIVE

Ken Burns's 'Jazz'

Jazz, the musician Matt Glaser opines at one point in Ken Burns's reverent new documentary film *Jazz*, "is the ultimate temporal art form. It's about the human experience of time." Time—a lot of it—is certainly at issue in the latest Burns-directed opus that PBS broadsides this month. The ten-part film (it started January 8) racks up a nearly nineteen-hour running time, all told—an eye-popping length if you're not a jazz junkie; a reasonable one if you are and if you factor in the seventy-five interviews, five-hundred-odd musical selections, twenty-four-hundred photographic stills, and two thousand archival film clips that the filmmakers have crammed in.

Kicking off in nineteenth-century New Orleans, where African-American spirituals and a potpourri of other musical genres gave birth to jazz, the documentary strolls thoughtfully through the decades, paying leisurely tribute to the childhood, training, stylistic originality, career fluctuations, marriages, and personal idiosyncrasies of seminal performers and composers, from pianist Jelly Roll Morton (who claimed to have invented jazz) on. While tunes, riffs, and narration ebb and flow on the soundtrack, the camera pans across historical photographs, or yields to original film sequences, many of them fascinating to contemplate in their own right. We see adorably antiquated cars parked on sepia-tinged streets; railroad cars barreling across the country, freighted with exhausted musicians on tour; cavorting girls in bobby socks; jitterbugging policemen; trumpet valves gleaming in the hands of geniuses. And surfacing periodically, as reminders of art's ever-symbiotic relationship with social forces, are images from historic upheavals like World War II, the civil-rights struggle, and protests over the Vietnam War.

Music to dance to

Less visually catchy but more immediate are the talking heads—critics, historians, musicians, and relatives or intimates of musicians, ranging from pianist Dave Brubeck to Mercedes Ellington (granddaughter of Duke) to *New York Times* cultural pundit Margo Jefferson. These raptly enthusiastic commentaries, centering principally on the personal and musical style of jazz masters, are the real culprits behind *Jazz*'s marathon scope. Why use just one account of Ellington's friendship with Billie ("Take the A Train") Strayhorn, when you can use two or three? Why provide a succinct overview of the last days of the heroin-addicted Charlie Parker, when numerous experts will chime in on the subject, at five times the length?

While their sheer mass may be overwhelming, the interviews do hew incisively into jazz's musical and metaphysical foundations. True, the insights can get a little rarified now and again: Critic Gary Giddins calls Louis Armstrong "American music's Dante," and trumpeter Wynton Marsalis compares Ellington to Dionysus. But usually the commentaries stick closer to earth, evoking character through colorful anecdotes—Parker's stopping his car on a country road so that he could perform for a cow, for example—or illuminating the contributions specific musicians have made to the jazz tradition.

Most intriguing, the experts' testimony sometimes cements the documentary's principal theme: that jazz is the quintessentially American art form. On a basic level, to begin with, jazz has been a sort of musical melting pot, absorbing as many diverse stylistic influences as the country has nationalities and ethnicities—spirituals, minstrel shows, Caribbean rhythms, ragtime, and the classical training of Creole musicians excluded from orchestras by Jim Crow laws.

Moreover, as Burns's interviewees repeatedly stress, good jazz functions like

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democracy at its best, encouraging individuality and self-expression while at the same time requiring serious teamwork. As Wynton Marsalis puts it in one of many conceptual tours de force he contributes to the documentary, "In American life we have all these different agendas. We have conflict all the time. And we're attempting to achieve harmony through conflict....And *that* is what jazz music is." So it's not surprising that jazz, which was heading out of its all-swing phase around World War II, was anathema to the Nazis, and even became a "resistance symbol" for the French, according to filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier.

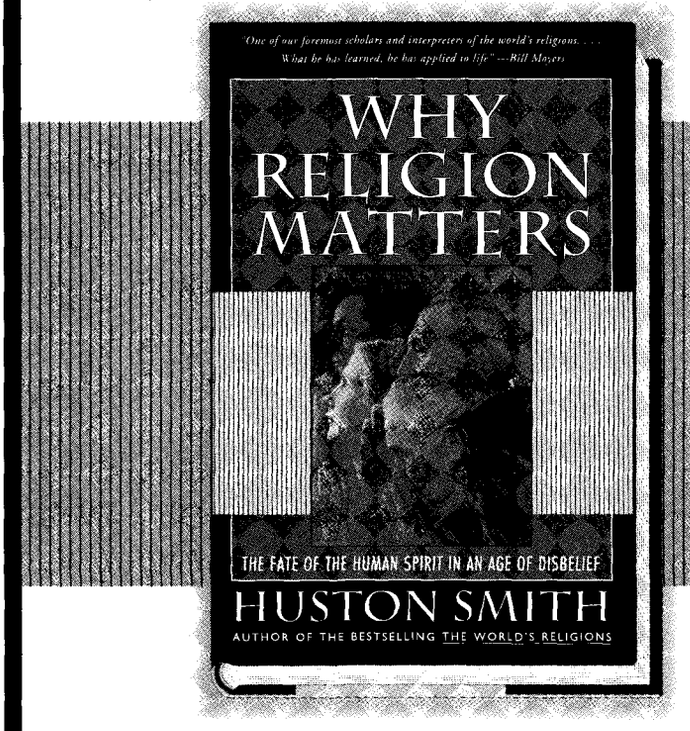
Jazz being so very American—and the battles between art, commerce, and mores being so constant through space and time—it's even less surprising that Burns's documentary zooms in on cultural conflicts that are similar to today's. Our era's ongoing hoopla over violent and sexist rap lyrics, for example, recalls some of the alarmist reactions to swing, which was denounced as "a phallic symbol set to sound," as dangerous music that "acts as a narcotic." Both cases involve appalled elders warning that the new craze would corrupt the young and contaminate society—a sentiment that, in fact, pays a backhanded compliment to the potency of art.

The denunciations of swing, of course, ultimately proved futile (the antirap movement hasn't exactly carried the day either), but as the clarinetist Artie Shaw observed, "Success is a big problem—bigger than failure." He was speaking from bitter experience, for his version of "Begin the Beguine" had enchanted audiences, who kept demanding that he play it—to the point that, Shaw complained, the song became "a millstone, an albatross around my neck!" Spotlighting this and similar anecdotes—for example, Louis Armstrong's reluctant interpretations of "Hello Dolly!"—*Jazz* broods repeatedly on the tyranny of popular taste, a reality with which visionary artists must perpetually contend. It's hard to make your living following the Muse if the public have flocked in the opposite direction, taking their wallets with them.

Creating innovative, aesthetically satisfying music in adverse circumstance is a heroic enterprise, the Burns documentary suggests. But the producers of *Jazz*, it must be said, have carried out a highly successful flirtation with Mammon. In honor of the TV series, Knopf has published a companion book: *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, which costs $65. And Sony Music and the Verve Music Group have released a five-CD box set of jazz classics, plus twenty-two individual-artist compilations and a single-CD overview of jazz history "with selections handpicked by Mr. Burns himself." Those who can't bother to trek deep into a record store in search of the overview recording may pick it up, along with a latte, at their local Starbucks, a sponsor of the series. The chain will carry the CD at three thousand stores nationwide.

Is all this, you may ask, in conflict or harmony with the lofty tone of the Burns documentary? Well, like jazz itself, it is probably both. □

SCIENCE IS NOT ENOUGH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Let's get physical

Einstein in Love
A Scientific Romance
Dennis Overbye
Viking, $27.95, 416 pp.

Chet Raymo

Einstein in Love is a sad saga of how love can go tragically wrong, and how being the smartest man on earth (and *Time* magazine's "Man of the Century") won't save you from traveling down that woeful road.

Dennis Overbye's engaging tale is partly a biography of the young Einstein, partly an exposition of early twentieth-century physics, and—best of all—an account of that mysterious place were heart and mind and flesh tangle in ways that no past, present, or future Einstein will ever unravel. Albert Einstein was the archetypal genius, but he was not smart enough to keep from getting his girlfriend pregnant, from messing up his marriage, and otherwise behaving as a cad to the women in his life.

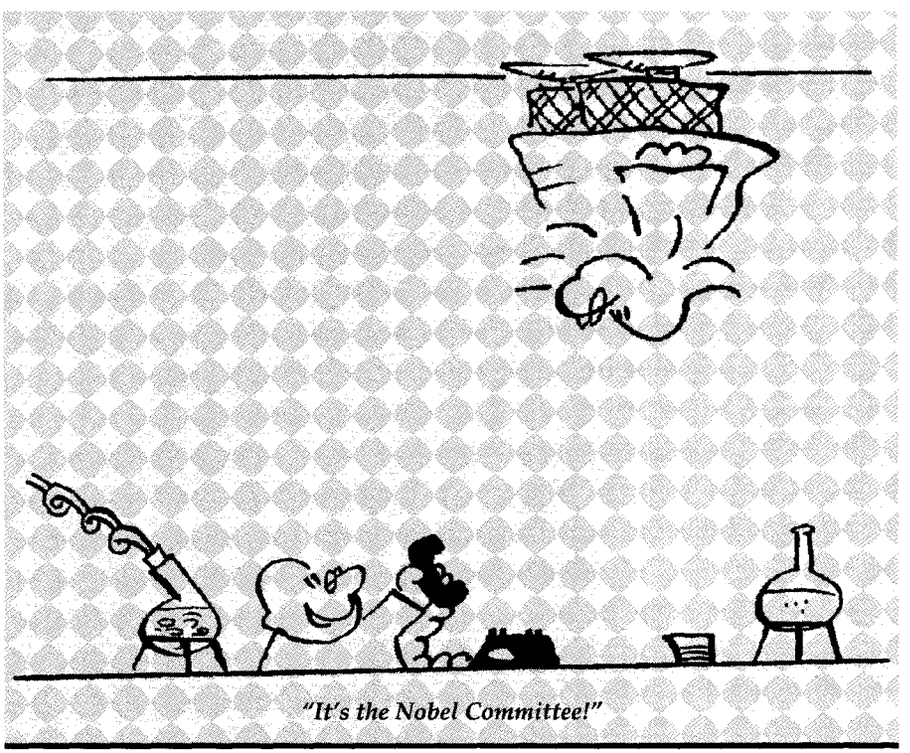
But the story begins, like all stories, with young people falling in love. The girl was Mileva Maric, delicate, brooding, brilliant, from the "wilds" of eastern Hungary, born with a hip abnormality that caused a lifelong limp. From an early age, she was mathematically precocious and determined to succeed. She was among the first girls to sit beside boys in high school classrooms of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Mileva met Albert at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. She was two years older than the handsome German, and recognized at once the keenness of his mind. Albert too appreciated the darkly sensual girl who rejected bourgeois pretensions and shared his passions for physics and mathematics. "I'm so lucky to have found you," he wrote Mileva in a letter, "a creature who is my equal, and who is as strong and independent as I am!" He called her Dollie; she called him Johnnie. They talked about the fundamental natures of matter, space, and time. They lived on "coffee, music, and physics."

To this reviewer's eye, a photograph of Mileva as a young mother bears a striking resemblance to photographs of Einstein's mother Pauline, who was always a formidable presence in his life (unfortunately, there are no photographs of her in this book). Pauline vehemently opposed her son's relationship with the poor, crippled easterner, perhaps for the same unconscious reason Albert found the girl attractive in the first place.

Albert and Mileva had potentially successful careers before them when in May 1901 Mileva expressed her fear that she might be pregnant. "Don't worry—you are my dear, good sweetheart whatever may happen," wrote Albert. He then moved on to his deeper concern: "I am not very satisfied with my theory of thermoelectricity." The pregnancy ended Mileva's hopes for a career in physics. Her girl child was born in Hungary, was left there when Mileva returned to Switzerland, and soon disappeared to history.

Two years later Albert married Mileva, but by then the bloom was off the rose. He apparently took the leap into matrimony out of a sense of duty. "Mileva had sacrificed her whole life, her honor, her ambition, and her child for him," writes Overbye, and Albert was



"It's the Nobel Committee!"

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not without honor. Almost at once, however, the marriage began spiraling downward. Two more children were born of the union, but Albert and Mileva became increasingly estranged. Meanwhile, he was falling in love with his cousin Elsa, who subsequently became his second wife. There were other women too, including Elsa's adult daughter Ilse.

Through all of these domestic tribulations, the physics went on. In 1905 the twenty-six-year-old Einstein published three papers that shook physics to its foundations and won him a reputation as a whiz kid of European physics. One of those papers, titled "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies," has been called the most famous scientific paper in history. It was the beginning of the theories of special and general relativity that Einstein elucidated over the following decade.

What was Mileva's role in the development of the theory of relativity? It is clear that the lovers batted these ideas about during their courtship, and that Mileva checked and rechecked Albert's work during the famous "Einsteinian spring" of 1905. Further, Mileva reportedly told her father early that year, "Not long ago we finished a very significant work that will make my husband world famous." Many historians wonder if that "we" stakes a claim on the authorship of the relativity theory.

Does the petite girl with dark eyes and probing mind deserve to be called the co-author of relativity? Probably not. Overbye presents the available evidence, and it seems clear that Albert was the source of the revolutionary new ideas. Nevertheless, at the end of this disturbing book the reader is ready to raise a modest monument to Mileva, and to give Albert a swift kick in the pants. There is sense in which the women in Einstein's life were certainly instrumental in the genesis of relativity. As mother Pauline and wife Mileva squabbled, Albert wrote: "No wonder that the love of science thrives under these circumstances, for it lifts me impersonally, and without railing and wailing, from the vale of tears into peaceful spheres."

Overbye shows us that Einstein's genius was "to extract the miraculous from thinking—really thinking—about the ordinary." The miracle of relativity—the foundation of all contemporary stories of creation—was rooted in the ordinary, and forged in the heat of a tempestuous love affair. Mileva Maric was muse, lover, math-checker, and ultimately, in Einstein's querulous words, an "unfriendly humorless creature who has nothing from life herself and smothers the joy in life of others through her mere presence."

Albert Einstein won the Nobel Prize for physics in in 1921, and by the terms of their divorce agreement the money went to Mileva. It was all she got for the years of devotion and inspiration. Dennis Overbye is a terrific writer and storyteller. His excellent book may be the monument that Mileva Maric deserves. □

Chet Raymo *teaches at Stonehill College in Massachusetts, and writes a science column for the* Boston Globe. *His most recent book is* Natural Prayers *(Ruminator Books).*

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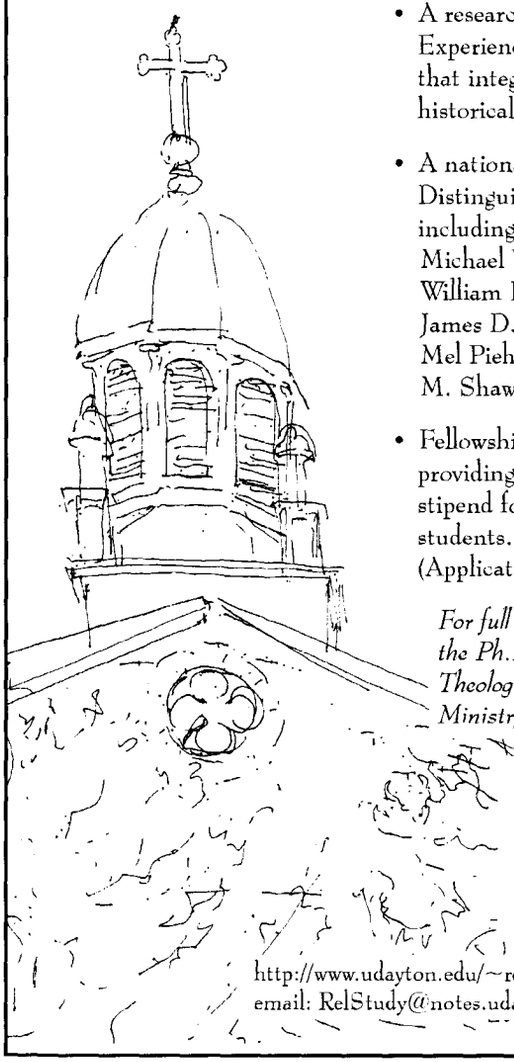

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Norton, $29.95, 380 pp.

John Rodden

George Orwell, whose last will and testament in 1950 specifically requested that no biography of him be written, has been the subject of three biographies in the last decade. Michael Sheldon, an American academic, published his "authorized" version in 1991, which induced Bernard Crick the following year to revise and expand his 1980 biography. Now comes Jeffrey Meyers.

Is there really anything new to say about Orwell (1903–50), the author of *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949), which between them have sold more than 40 million copies in sixty-two languages? Or is the continuing urge to chronicle his life a simple reflection of the booming biography business, what James Joyce referred to as the "cult of the biografiends"? As it turns out, Meyers has a lot that is new and interesting to say, and has a different set of emphases than the earlier biographers. For instance, he is less preoccupied with the transformation of the Etonian and Burma soldier Eric Blair into the writer George Orwell and devotes more attention to Orwell's last years, to the mixed motivations of his second wife (Sonia Brownell) for marrying him, to Orwell's psychology, and to his literary legacy.

The psychological emphasis has resulted in a much darker portrait. Meyers's key claim is that Orwell essentially destroyed himself because he had a fixed, distorted image of himself as a hardy man of action who could invariably take risks and survive them. In Meyers's view, that self-delusion accounted for Orwell's self-punishing behavior. In a kind of masquerade of toughness, Orwell practiced excruciating self-deprivation and tested his physical limits constantly.

Orwell's severity toward himself did have something soldierly and even heroic about it (and resembled that of T.E. Lawrence, a.k.a Lawrence of Arabia). But Orwell also had a masochistic streak that at times induced him to deny himself (and his first wife, Eileen) minimal creature comforts, even after he had achieved success, fame, and modest wealth toward the end of his life.

And so, in 1948, despite suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, Orwell wouldn't leave the bleak island of Jura in the Scottish Hebrides to get a typist in London for *1984* (he insisted on typing the manuscript himself). Instead, he subjected himself to Jura's horrible winters—after just having spent several months in a Scottish tuberculosis sanatorium for treatment.

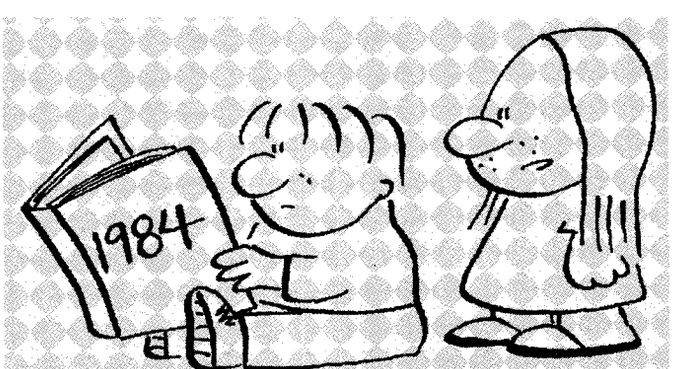
This behavior prevailed throughout Orwell's life. In the 1930s, he insisted on living in a filthy, decrepit, run-down house in Wallington, outside London. He pushed himself constantly, never really took a rest (let alone a vacation), and collapsed numerous times from sheer exhausation and illness—and yet continued to go on, even enlisting in Spain as a soldier fighting in an anarchist militia against General Franco and the fascists. (He took a bullet in his windpipe in 1937, which left him voiceless for weeks and permanently weakened his speaking voice.) Although Orwell did not deny himself sexually—he had numerous affairs—I have the impression that sex functioned for him as a physical release rather than a sensual pleasure. It was less a loving act than a homeostatic pressure valve that enabled him to maintain his ruthless self-discipline. Sex was an outlet to balance the self-imposed tensions of constant work, the cheap housing, the poor diet, the lack of long-term self-care. At some level, Orwell was convinced that he wasn't worth spending money on.

Sad as all this is—and Meyers presents it soberly and convincingly—we must also marvel at the passion, determination, and creative drive that enabled Orwell to turn his neuroses and limitations toward artistic ends.

Lest this short review leave any doubt about the physical obstacles Orwell overcame, Meyers devotes an entire appendix ("A History of Illness") to Orwell's ailments, which began with bronchitis at the age of nineteen months and continued with repeated bouts of pneumonia, lung hemorrhage, and TB during his youth and early manhood.

Orwell died of TB at the age of forty-six, in January 1950. His final years in hospital were tragicomic and heart-rending. His friend David Astor, publisher of the *London Observer*, interceded to procure streptomycin from the United States (the U.K. still banned it in 1947), and Orwell could have been cured by this new wonder drug. Unfortunately, he was probably the first patient in Britain to receive this treatment, was given an overdose by the inexperienced doctors, and had severe reactions to it. (Ironically, Orwell gave the drug to two fellow patients, who were completely cured.)

Meyers dubs Orwell's last



"I don't know—probably some historical novel."

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years, part of which were spent on Jura, his "Jurassic period." Betrayed by his self-image, Meyers believes, Orwell the tubercular patient succumbed to "a compulsion to live an arduous and exhausting existence on the the wet bog in windy moorlands," a "typically perverse and even suicidal" impulse. As Orwell himself admitted before his final relapse, he "had to finish the wretched book." Meyers concludes: "He'd never admit that he was a permanent invalid, too weak to live on Jura and that the whole way of life there had been madness."

That is the most controversial claim of this new biography. Meyers clarifies and corrects Bernard Crick's claim that Jura had a salubrious, mild climate. Instead, Meyers emphasizes not just the isolation of Jura from the mainland (the trip from London took forty-eight hours by train, boat, and hiking), but also that medical assistance was virtually unobtainable. (When Orwell's son Richard once got sick, after falling off a chair and gashing his forehead, it took six hours to get him to a doctor. If Orwell had suffered a serious hemorrhage on Jura, he would have died before receiving medical treatment.) As Meyers notes, the sea-level location, damp climate, and arduous life were also precisely the opposite of the high altitude, thin, dry air, and prolonged rest recommended for patients with lung disease.

The biography is at its best when dealing with Orwell's last years. Meyers partly attributes the darkness of *1984* to Orwell's declining health and the bleakness of life on Jura. He goes into excruciating detail discussing the treatment for tuberculosis in the 1940s and Orwell's physical agonies. This does explain Orwell's great novel better and, in particular, the suffering of his fictional hero Winston Smith during the torture scenes in Room 101. Meyers's point is well established: Orwell was living in that room. "The creation of *1984* virtually killed Orwell," Meyers concludes, "and the novel's vision of the future is correspondingly grim." □

John Rodden *is the author of* The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of Saint George Orwell *(Oxford University Press).*

SURVIVING MAO

Colors of the Mountain
Da Chen
Random House, $25, 320 pp.

Nicholas Clifford

Colors of the Mountain is one of a growing number of Cultural Revolution survival stories appearing in English. Liang Heng's *Son of the Revolution*, Yue Daiyun's *To the Storm*, Nien Cheng's *Shanghai Diary*, and Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* are a few of the better-known ones. Though the Cultural Revolution (its official dates of 1966–76 are as good as any) has obviously not come close to matching the Holocaust in America's collective consciousness, there's a sense in which it plays a similar role: as the Holocaust sometimes seems the defining experience of modern Jewish (or perhaps modern German, or even European) history for many Americans, so the Cultural Revolution has become the defining experience of modern Chinese history.

Perhaps that's because the Cultural Revolution, like the Holocaust, has clear heroes, villains, and victims. Yet in ways the real Chinese analogy to the Holocaust may not be so much the Cultural Revolution as the terrible famine that preceded it by a few years. The famine was directly attributable to Mao's policies and probably cost somewhere around 30 million lives—a figure staggering even by the standards of other great twentieth-century atrocities.

In 1962, the year Da Chen was born, China was just beginning to recover from this catastrophe, and yet only four years later Mao and his colleagues engineered the disaster of the Cultural Revolution. Chen is younger than the other memoirists cited above, and though his family went through difficult times because of its "bad class background" (his father had been a landlord), the author thus did not have the same kind of experience in, say, the Red Guards that others have written about. Yet he found himself brought up against a glass ceiling; not only was he mistreated in school, but he was also not permitted to continue his education beyond a certain point. Bullied by those who resented the former privileges of his family or who found him an easy target in an age when denunciation was encouraged, Chen fell in with an older gang of boys who had not only dropped out of school but were thoroughly alienated from society as a whole. Yet they are portrayed here as a sympathetic lot; they accepted Chen for what he was, inaugurating him into their fellowship in a way that comes right out of *The Outlaws of the Marsh*, one of the classic Chinese novels of outsiders banding together in a righteous cause against oppression.

From his alienated peers Chen found the support denied him by the official exemplars of Mao's society. After the Great Helmsman's death in 1976, the educational system which Mao had done so much to destroy began to pull itself together again. Chen found himself back in school, reflecting on the irony of sitting under a slogan from the chairman, of all people, urging intellectual excellence. "If Mao had known what his Little Red Guards were doing, he would have howled like a lonely wolf in his icy coffin and cried his smoke-ridden lungs out. Mao, the dictator, was the friend of the devils. He wanted China in perpetual turmoil so that he could rule forever." Cheered on by the gang members, Da Chen buckled down to work, and the book ends as he and his elder brother win places in universities at a time when doing so was "as rare as hitting all six numbers in the lottery."

Though from the dust jacket we learn that, after his studies in Beijing, he went

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on to law school at Columbia University in New York, Chen gives us only recollections of his boyhood in south China. The same dust jacket has inscribed upon it the Chinese character *zao*, which means to make, to manufacture, to fabricate, but seems to bear no relationship to anything in the book—a reminder, perhaps, that the memoir is itself a kind of construction, fraught with problems for readers, no less than writers. As readers, not only must we beware the elements of self-justification (among others) that may intrude (think of the memoirs of statesmen, generals, celebrities), we must also be aware of the chronological and cultural distance that often separates the writers of memoirs from the subjects whose lives they narrate; for they are no longer the younger men and women they seek to bring alive on their pages. They must thus choose between two possible voices: the first using the language and perceptions that come out of the past, thinking themselves back into their youth; the second—like Henry Adams and Vladimir Nabokov, to name two of our greatest memoirists—presenting their former personas as almost fictionalized characters whom they now understand far better than they did when they were living through the experiences they describe.

Though today a New Yorker, Chen writes primarily in the voice of a boy growing up in a southern Chinese village some thirty or forty years ago. Though I do not find the style always convincing, that may simply be a matter of personal taste. It is a courageous choice in which he sets himself two tasks. Not only must he make yesterday's idiom into a language that makes sense to the present, he must also create a cultural and linguistic translation in which the Chinese idiom makes sense to his foreign audience in America. The result is a lively writing style and, with it, an appreciation of the gutsiness of Chen and some of his friends. □

Nicholas Clifford's *most recent book,* A Truthful Impression of the Country, *about Western travel writing on China, will be published by the University of Michigan Press this year.*

RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Lawrence S. Cunningham

Early Christian art, as Robin Jensen understands it, falls into two rather distinct chronological periods: the pre-Constantinian art of the third and fourth centuries and the early Byzantine period which runs roughly from the mid-fourth century to the early sixth century. In the earlier period, the subject of the surviving visual artifacts falls into four categories: (1) borrowings from the pagan world; (2) neutral images which most likely have a Christian emphasis (for example, the anchor, dove, or olive branch); (3) biblical narratives;

Understanding Early Christian Art
Robin Margaret Jensen
Routledge, $25.99, 221 pp.

(4) portraits of Christ and the saints. The more crucial question of interpretation, of course, is why certain subjects were chosen and what they meant. Were depictions of the three young men in the fiery furnace or Susanna and the falsely accusing elders an allusion to persecution or did such representations have an eschatological significance, or both? Was the art after Constantine's edict of toleration subtle propaganda for imperial power or did it reflect the orthodoxy emerging from the Christological debates and their conciliar resolution? Why was there so little reference to the cross (and almost none to the crucifixion) in early Christian art? What doctrinal understandings stood behind the depiction of Christ as Orpheus or Helios or the seated philosopher or lawgiver? Further, how did the transition come about from Christ as a beardless youth to one who was bearded? How did early Christian art depict the Resurrection?

Jensen discusses these questions and others in an orderly, careful, and clear manner. Her extensive notes indicate how carefully she has looked at the scholarly record and the text shows how judiciously she assesses contending opinions. To cite one example, the discussion of the frequent use of the image of the fish goes beyond the obvious explanation of the acronym by which the Greek word *ichthys* stands for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." Jensen reminds us of how much the baptismal sermons of both the Latin and Greek fathers relied on the symbolism of fish and water. The fish sometimes depicted in meal scenes in the catacombs—most famously in the catacombs of Priscilla—is plausibly understood to refer to the post-Resurrection meals of Jesus described in John's Gospel and hint of the messianic banquet for those whose bodies lie in the underground cemeteries. Such scenes, Jensen argues, are not eucharistic but eschatological (why not both?).

I often use examples of early Christian art from the works of Gradon Snyder and F. van der Meer in my classes. To those surveys I will now add this excellent book. Jensen is careful to give all plausible scholarly opinions an honest hearing but is not afraid to express her own judgment.

Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader
Edited by Kenneth J. Collins
Baker, $26.99, 400 pp.

The subtitle of Collins's anthology on spirituality should be taken seriously. The range of essays in this collection stretches from the Evangelical perspective to the Anglican, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic traditions. Still, any course in Christian spirituality must engage primary texts. The essays in this collection only provide background for such an engagement. Consequently, this book is best used as ancillary material for a university or seminary course on Christian spirituality.

Collins divides his collection into seven large sections. The first two deal with problems of definition (he includes the now classic essay of the late Walter

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Principe) and methodology. In the third section a brief overview of "Christian Traditions" is provided. This is perhaps the thinnest of the sections because it covers too much material in too limited a space (Roman Catholic spirituality becomes limited to the excellent essay on the Carmelites by Keith Egan). Separate essays cover Orthodox spirituality as well as Anglican and various Protestant schools. Likewise, the fourth section on spirituality and theology is too limited to explore fully this crucial theme. It is also a topic of great debate, as is readily seen by contrasting Charles Bernard's rather traditional approach to "spiritual theology" with an essay on spirituality and the academy by Sandra Schneiders. The final three sections feature essays on spirituality and sacred Scripture, the Trinity, and Christian feminist spirituality.

Christian spirituality provides many opportunities for ecumenical sharing. This anthology has introduced me to Wesleyan and Evangelical materials I was only vaguely acquainted with. However, I do have two minor criticisms. First, this book would have been enriched by a selected annotated bibliography. Second, some kind of essay attempting to tie the seemingly disparate strands of the various "schools" into a more organic whole would have been desirable. Such a synthesis could have provided a greater sense of coherence to this collection.

Faithful Dissenters
Robert McClory
Orbis, $16, 180 pp.

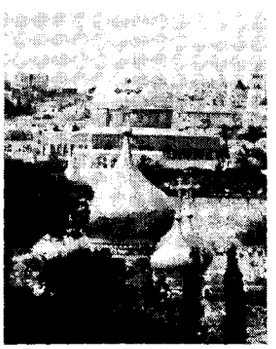
The title of Robert McClory's book is slightly misleading since not all the persons profiled in this highly readable account were "dissenters" in the technical sense of the term. Hildegard of Bingen, for instance, did go mano a mano with some local hierarchs, but her theological vision was not so much dissent as it was a fresh way of thinking about things. She also enjoyed the support of powerful people, including the redoubtable Bernard of Clairvaux. Catherine of Siena should be seen less as a dissenter and more as a prophetic figure. Neither Mary Ward nor the Australian Mary McKillop was a dissenter: they were very tough women who became victims of clerical stupidity and episcopal bullies and whose vindication came only after their deaths. The Vatican has honored both, but one hopes that posthumous church honors will also include profound apologies for the way certain prophetic women have been treated by those who wield clerical power.

McClory is concerned with the ways in which certain figures stand in tension with the institutional church. In light of recent actions from Rome (think of the scandalous badgering of Jacques Dupuis, S.J.), one finds some consolation in knowing that Yves Congar suffered in a similar fashion only half a century ago. History, of course, is full of these cautionary tales, as McClory makes abundantly clear.

Perhaps the most interesting section of *Faithful Dissenters* is McClory's account of the struggles over usury in the sixteenth century. Using the seminal work of John Noonan, McClory details how theologians, bishops (including Charles Borromeo), and Rome tried to get out of the impasse of the magisterial teaching that condemned the taking of interest on loans as intrinsically evil. At one point a pope allowed exceptions for those who held 5 percent interest contracts if the persons were "miserable" (for example, widows). In other words, exceptions were made to the observance of a prohibition against a practice called "intrinsically" evil. The chapter on usury will be of particular interest for those concerned about the church's current teaching on contraception.

McClory, a frequent contributor to the Catholic press, teaches journalism at Northwestern University. One expects him to write clearly and persuasively; that expectation is met. Though not a professional theologian, he is quite capable of writing about theology and does so lucidly (see his chapters on Theodore of Mopsuestia and Hincmar of Reims). In the contemporary climate of theological debate it is good to remind ourselves of what Cardinal Newman wrote to a potential convert worried about papal infallibility. Everything coming from Rome, the eminent theologian noted, must be interpreted by the theologian and must be received by the church. That process of reception, as this readable book makes clear, is not always immediate or gracious. At times it results in disaster, as in Rome's ignorant reaction to the pioneering efforts of Matteo Ricci to inculturate Christianity in seventeenth-century China. One reads that story, briefly recounted, as something vividly contemporary. One thinks, almost instinctively, of the contemporary travails of Dupuis. After forty years in India, Dupuis tried to think through Christian faith in the light of the world's religions only to spend his older years writing memos to hacks in the Vatican explaining why he is not heterodox.

Doris Grumbach's latest memoir revolves around her plan to have a party for her eightieth birthday. Naturally, the party is really only scaffolding for Grumbach to look back on her friends (everyone from Gypsy Rose Lee to Dorothy Day), to chronicle her reading, and to ac-



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The Pleasure of Their Company
Doris Grumbach
Beacon Press, $22, 119 pp.

count for her days. Those days begin before dawn with the psalms and end when Sybil, her companion, closes the bookstore they maintain across the road from their Maine home. Interlaced in this story are flashbacks to her career as a teacher, editor, wife, mother, and much-published literary critic.

There is so much to admire (or, indeed, envy) about Grumbach's life. Her home in Maine is snug, her library extensive (I envy anyone who actually owns all twenty volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary—my first purchase when I hit the lottery), and she is blessed with enough leisure to read all of Proust's *À la recherche* while planning her party. I also revel in the fact that Grumbach and I have many of the same prejudices. We both love the writings of Thomas Merton with the same ardor with which we loathe Ayn Rand. We both view computers with ambivalence (too easy to become prolix but a blessing when fixing bad paragraphs) and read too fast. Grumbach vows to slow down while I am still hopelessly addicted. We do part company on cats (she for, I against), and I was a tad sad that she actually reads that episcopal windbag, John Shelby Spong.

At the heart of her life, however, is prayer, as she made even more clear in her earlier book, *The Presence of Absence*—a work I recommended in this column and recommend again. Grumbach is a believer, or, more precisely, one who strives for belief. This shows up not only in the discipline of her quotidian life but in her obvious penchant for those striking aphorisms—*pensées*—that stud her text. She frequently records lines from her reading that seem appropriate for meditation. Such recollections fit well into her approach to spirituality, an approach best summed up in a line she quotes from Proust: "Yet the more one is religious, the less one dares to move toward certainty, to go beyond what one actually believes...." It is that modest chord that runs through this elegantly written and very moving memoir.

Late in the process of writing *Little Saint*, Hannah Green saw that what she was writing was not history or art history or hagiography. *Little Saint* is more like a "novel, a literary work" that would draw on her experiences living in the French village of Conques in the 1970s, and on the cult of Sainte Foy, whose ancient image was guarded in the village.

Little Saint
Hannah Green
Random House, $25.95, 272 pp.

Saint Foy, an early third-century martyr, is best known for the magnificent reliquary, made in the tenth century and kept in the village. Conques was a celebrated stop, all through the Middle Ages, on the pilgrimage route to Saint James in Compostela. The pilgrims and crusaders who visited Conques spread devotion to Foy around the world. There were well-developed cults all over Europe, Latin America, and even in this country where she is honored under the name of Santa Fe in New Mexico.

Green, an Episcopalian, recognizes the numinous quality of the veneration of this saint and its influence in the ancient village. She investigated the historical background of the cult and, in the process, became a good friend of those who live in the modern village of roughly two hundred people. She not only gives us a sense of village life but in the process reconstructs its ancient, pre-Christian roots. In passing we learn about the thousand-year-old hagiographical tradition about Saint Foy, the patois spoken in the area (whose origins are in the Celtic and Occitan tongues), medieval poetry recited in Saint Foy's honor, the reliquary donated by Charlemagne in the ninth century, the great tympanum over the church's door done in the fantastic form of the Romanesque, and the dolmens found in the larger region. These wonderful details are intertwined with descriptions of daily life in the village and the occupations of its inhabitants. Because she started writing the book in the 1970s, Green was able to converse with men who had done forced labor in Germany during the war and those who had worked with the French resistance. She vividly captures the villagers' closeness to the soil but also the slow intrusions of modernity.

Green did not set out to write hagiography, but I think this is hagiography at its best. She has an empathetic eye that allows her to see the power of the saint. However, that same instinct led her to do serious research that puts the saint's cult into historical context. The result is a book that seamlessly blends ethnography, culinary history, the milieu in which the village developed, and the enduring piety of those who were nourished for over a millennium by the spiritual power of the virgin saint. This is one of the best books I have ever read on a saint. I cannot recommend it too highly, both for the beauty of the writing and the deep sensibility that informs every page. This work is a quantum leap beyond those dreary bestsellers in which expatriates go on and on about the joys of Tuscany or Provence. There is a thickness to *Little Saint*—a density that comes from eminent sympathy for the subject, a good historical sense, and a keen religious sensibility. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

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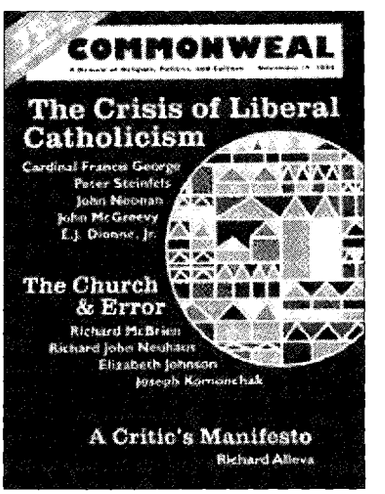

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

it is a virtual certainty that, given the rapid advances in these fields, we will know with a high level of confidence its causes within the next several decades. Is the goal (agenda) of the church, while showing compassion to gays, to support research to eliminate this objective disorder through means acceptable to the church, for example, genetic surgery in utero with no adverse side effects? Such a thought sends tremors of fear and distrust into the minds and hearts of the gay community, who are already fighting an uphill battle for their legitimate place at the Lord's table. Until such time as the church can move toward a more neutral stance on the interpretation of the orientation itself—at root, a difficult, but serious theological and philosophical question—most dialogue between the gay community and the church will remain one of defensive posturing. ROBERT J. COMISKEY
Springfield, Va.

The editors comment: We doubt that the official church is supporting research to eliminate gays through genetic surgery, or otherwise.

Voting rights

Your stand against the bombastic activities of the Bush campaign was courageous, ("Votes Count," December 15, 2000). But I also agree with those who said Gore should have asked for the statewide recount first thing, so it wouldn't look like he hand-picked the counties where he expected the most support. I will keep a copy of your editorial with my *Boston Globe* from the day after the election as a reminder of the preciousness of my vote and everyone else's. The editorial echoes the sentiments of many Americans, even beyond partisanship, yet speaks volumes about our resilient, but battered democratic system of government and the primacy of the vote.
DIANE LAVOS
Natick, Mass.

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Send letter, curriculum vitae, and names of references to Timothy Kulbicki, O.F.M. Conv., Dean of the School of Theology, Saint Mary's Seminary and University, 5400 Roland Avenue, Baltimore, MD, 21210, by FAX at 410-433-1384, or E-mail Tkulbicki@stmarys.edu

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A MODEST HOPE FOR MODESTA

Katie Quirk

Modesta was on the porch that first evening, two years ago, when I arrived at Saint Augustine University of Tanzania as a Jesuit Volunteer. There stood a dark-skinned adolescent with close-cropped hair, whose gender I could detect only because of her ruffly dress. She balanced a tray of papayas on her head, hoping to make a sale to the new teacher. Modesta addressed me shyly, dipping to a full bend at the knee, and whispered her Kiswahili greeting, acknowledging me as her elder.

Little did I know that this thirteen-year-old was one of a dozen children in a polygamous family, and that she shared a single bed with three sisters. Nor did I know that her days consisted of carrying buckets of water on her head, scavenging wood and cooking for eleven, and "learning" in the village primary school in a classroom with forty desks and more than a hundred children. Most important, I did not know that, over my two-year stay in East Africa, Modesta would be my greatest teacher of Kiswahili and Tanzanian custom, and quite simply, my best friend.

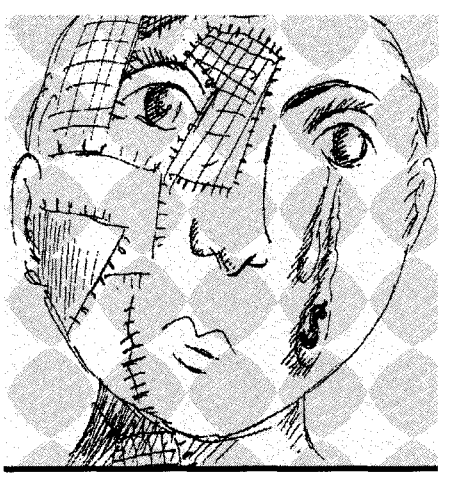
Within my first week, Modesta's family invited me to dinner and to spend the night. Modesta led me on the ten-minute but worlds-apart walk down a dusty road and around immense boulders to her village of cornfields, bleating goats, and ramshackle, reed-roofed mud huts. As I squatted next to Modesta in the smoky cooking hut, I saw a house with no electricity or running water, no screens to keep out the malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and with only an outdoor pit toilet.

I was one of nine females that evening who sat around a single platter of stiff corn-meal porridge that, aside from a teacup of beans intended exclusively for me as the honored guest, constituted our meal. When we finished, Modesta helped me hang my mosquito net, the only one in the house that night, over her elder sisters' single bed the two of us would share.

During my first year in Tanzania, Modesta and I grew close. Sometimes I was clearly the elder, encouraging Modesta to save her hard-earned money after her daily seventy-foot climbs into papaya trees, teaching her not to interrupt people, and answering her questions about AIDS. Equally often, she was my elder, showing me how to fan a cooking fire to life, helping me by effortlessly carrying buckets of water atop her head, or poking me when I overlooked greeting a stranger.

But one Saturday morning Modesta appeared at my front door, her eyes downcast, her voice uncharacteristically quiet. Her father had not come home in two nights. The children had gone to bed without food. Modesta wanted half the fruit-selling earnings she had deposited with me (to buy a gift for her father). She wanted to buy corn flour for her siblings. I gave her the money and, pretending that I had not eaten, invited her to breakfast. She said she wasn't hungry. We both knew she was, but she wanted to hurry home to cook porridge for the family.

Modesta seemed not to resent the fact that, at fourteen, she was providing for her siblings. She seemed not to mind that in my house there was not only food, but also such luxuries as powdered milk, peanut butter, and pineapples. In fact, after making up for the lost savings, Modesta bought me a shiny second-hand blouse, as well as a pair of used corduroy pants for her father, who had eventually returned home.



As Modesta neared graduation from primary school, I began to worry. Many of her prepubescent female classmates had already dropped out of school, and were matched with strangers in prearranged marriages. Hoping to help her avoid such a fate, I offered to enroll her in a girls' secondary school and to pay her fees ($300 a year for five years). She now boards in town at the school where she can escape the interminable chores of her home and can focus on her studies. Visitors are allowed only once a month.

I miss Modesta. During her occasional visits home, she brings her notebooks to show me her lessons. Her English, the instructional language in secondary school, is improving, and she is proud of herself and her school. For one assignment she had to memorize verbatim a two-page encyclopedia entry on nutrition. This struck me as ironic, considering her school diet consists solely of porridge, rice, and beans. No fruits or vegetables. She did not see the irony.

Although I will continue to pay for her secondary-school education, I hope that when I leave someone will look out for Modesta and remind her that she is a beautiful and talented young woman. I hope that she has some choices in life. □

Katie Quirk, *a graduate of Haverford College, taught journalism and English at Saint Augustine University of Tanzania, under the sponsorship of Jesuit Volunteers International.*

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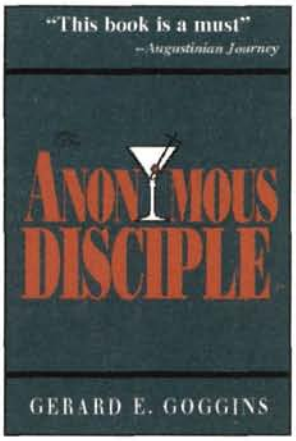

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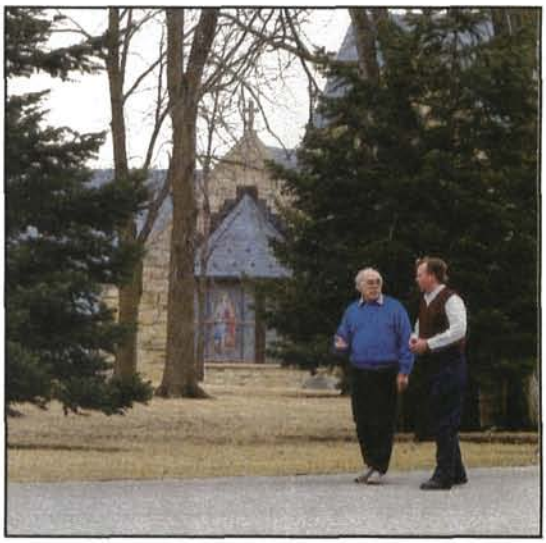

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